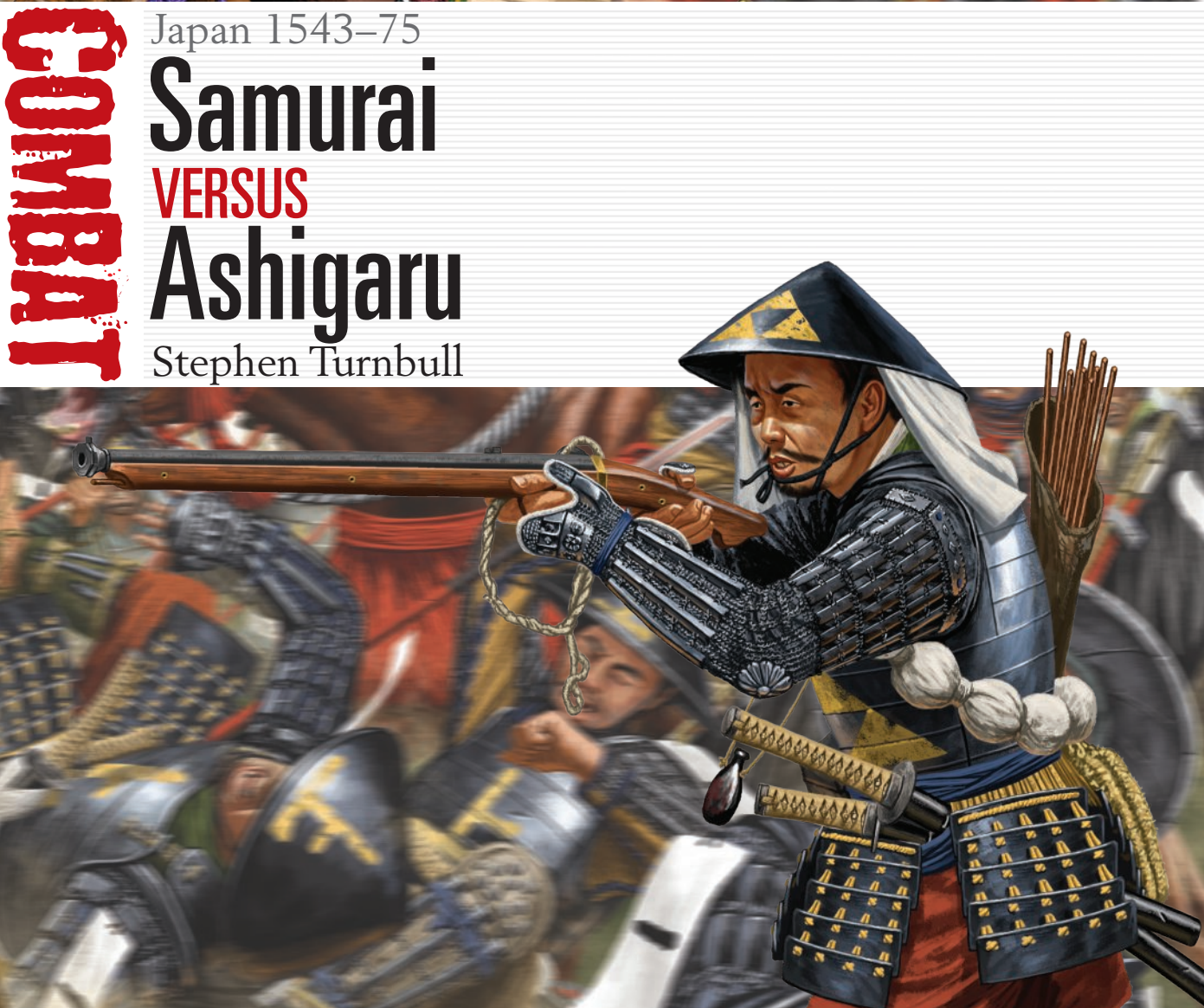




COMBAT

Japan 1543–75

Samurai VERSUS Ashigaru

Stephen Turnbull

Japan 1543–75

COMBAT VERSUS Samurai Ashigaru

Stephen Turnbull



Illustrated by Johnny Shumate

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
THE OPPOSING SIDES	9
Status, recruitment and motivation • Command, control and organization Tactics • Weapons and equipment	
UEDAHARA	30
23 March 1548	
MIKATA GA HARA	42
25–26 January 1573	
NAGASHINO	54
28 June 1575	
ANALYSIS	72
AFTERMATH	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78
INDEX	80

Introduction

OPPOSITE

The theme of this book is the contrast between the proud and magnificent mounted samurai and the lowly ashigaru, and the appearance of the former is summed up in this illustration of Naitō Ienaga (1546–1600), shown here posed on a general's camp stool in a painting in Nobeoka Museum. Naitō Ienaga served Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) and is depicted here as a samurai archer like his noble ancestors with an ornate fur-covered quiver and a lacquered bow. His armour is nevertheless a practical battledress of the Sengoku Period. He has a sword and dagger at his belt. This painting sums up the idea of the elite samurai.

According to *Zōhyō Monogatari* (literally 'The Soldier's Tale'), 'When faced with an enemy on horseback the best course of action is to shoot the horse first and then the man. However, everything depends upon the timing; sometimes it is better to shoot the man and let the riderless horse run off into the enemy lines and create havoc' (Sasama 1968: 363). *Zōhyō Monogatari* is believed to have been compiled by a high-ranking samurai general during the peaceful Edo Period (1603–1868), probably sometime around 1649. The book is essentially a training manual for those officers who had command of the ashigaru (literally the 'light feet'), the foot soldiers in a contemporary Japanese army. The passage refers specifically to the deployment of organized ashigaru weapon squads against elite mounted samurai, the dramatic contrast in both weaponry and status that is the theme of this book.

Around 1640 the need for expert advice on how to deal with such a confrontation between troop types was taken for granted. In 1540, however, when wars were still being fought, providing such advice would have been seen as an insult to samurai pride, because the samurai regarded themselves not only as elite warriors but also as the only real warriors in Japan. The mounted samurai despised the foot soldiers against whom they were sometimes compelled to fight, and indeed many of the lower-class troops deployed at that time were still being casually recruited into an army by the prospect of loot and just as casually dismissed. They were contemptuously regarded as ill-disciplined mobs that could be dispersed as carelessly as they had once been recruited, so to a samurai the concept of 'mounted samurai versus ashigaru' in any serious confrontational sense would have been a ridiculous idea. It would require a military revolution to make the samurai change their minds, and this is the story of how that revolution happened when the unquestionable notion of samurai supremacy was seriously challenged.



The subsequent ‘mounted samurai versus ashigaru’ confrontations described in this book would become a collision of tactics, social attitudes and even Japanese culture itself. The three battles chosen as case studies took place against a backdrop of seemingly unending strife, because by the 1540s Japan had been a country at war with itself for almost 100 years. The central authority maintained for centuries by the Shogun – a position equivalent to that of a military dictator – had virtually collapsed, leaving the provinces of Japan as lawless places where rival warlords called daimyo (literally ‘big names’) engaged in a series of local civil wars. Later historians would call the era ‘The Age of Warring States’ (1467–1603). As time went by some daimyo inevitably prospered and grew stronger while others failed, a situation that became abundantly clear to the first European visitors to Japan who arrived from Portugal in 1543. The country may have been nominally united under the Shogun by the grace of the sacred emperor, a man who (the Portuguese quickly discovered) possessed even less political power than the Shogun, but in practical terms no one seemed able to control the leaders of the petty kingdoms with which the incoming merchants, missionaries and traders exclusively had to deal.

The other observation which the Portuguese would have made very early on in their relations with Japan was that the fighting between these rival daimyo seemed to be conducted by armies of elite warriors called samurai. Most samurai rode horses, carried long spears and wore elaborate armour that looked very strange to anyone accustomed to the smooth iron plates worn by Europe’s own noble knights. The more astute Portuguese observers might also have noted that in addition to these splendid warriors a daimyo’s army would

ABOVE RIGHT

The first ashigaru to be used in daimyo armies were casually recruited and poorly armed, as shown by this representative group in a detail from *Ehon Toyotomi Kunkaki*. Only one ashigaru has a proper spear. His companion has a spear made out of a piece of cut bamboo. A third ashigaru has an improvised weapon made by tying a sickle to a pole. All three ashigaru have swords at their belts but are otherwise without any defensive armour or weaponry.

The campaigns of Takeda Shingen and Takeda Katsuyori, 1548, 1572 and 1575

MAP KEY

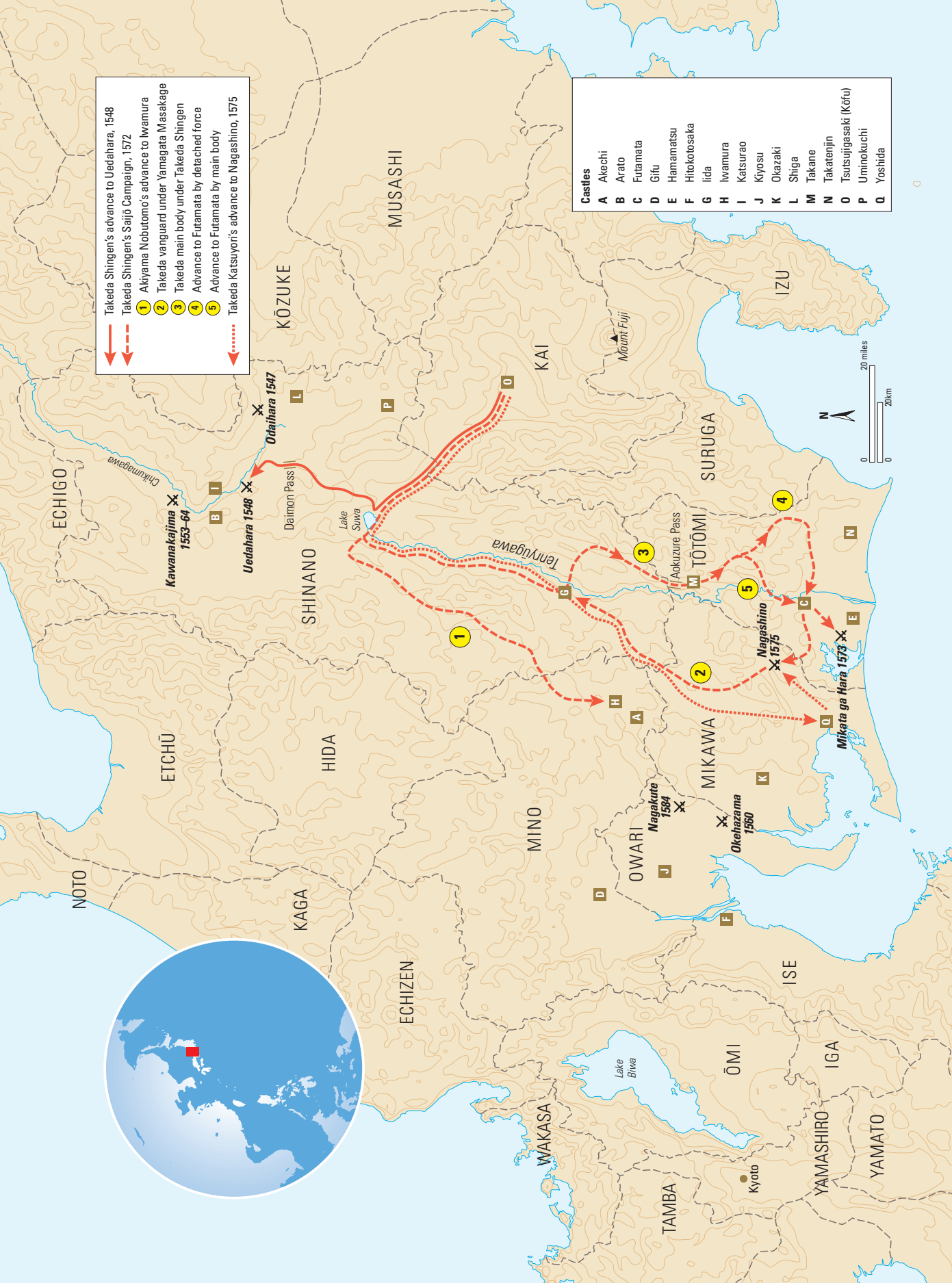
The three 'samurai versus ashigaru' conflicts described in this book were important milestones in the strategic ambitions of the Takeda family. Each of the three battles was the culmination of a particular military campaign conducted by the Takeda as part of a programme to extend their influence beyond their landlocked home province of Kai (modern-day Yamanashi Prefecture), which was looked down upon and defended by huge mountains including the famous Mount Fuji. The provinces through which the competing armies marched were dominated by these mountains, now known as the Japan Alps, which are separated from the Pacific Coast by a comparatively narrow strip of flat land. In 1540 the mountains could only be crossed in two ways: by a few long-established mountain passes or by taking more tortuous routes that followed the flow of a number of rivers. The location of the Takeda headquarters at Tsutsujigasaki

(modern-day Kōfu City) and the presence of hostile enemies to the east therefore required the Takeda armies to begin all three campaigns by marching north. In 1548 Takeda Shingen carried on northwards to confront Murakami Yoshikiyo, who was based at the castle of Katsurao, at Uedahara. In 1572 and 1575 the Takeda armies swung round to the south-west from the area of Lake Suwa to threaten the territories of Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu. The 1572 advance eventually split into four separate movements. Nobunaga's key positions were Gifu in Mino Province and Kiyosu in Owari Province. The Tokugawa targets were Ieyasu's Hamamatsu Castle in Tōtōmi Province and his son Nobuyasu's Okazaki Castle in Mikawa Province. Other battles and castles indicated here, such as Takatenjin and Kawanakajima, played a role in separate conflicts involving the Takeda and are described in the text.

probably include many foot soldiers, although they were a very mixed bag. Some were lucky enough to serve on a long-term basis as servants, labourers, grooms and weapon-carriers for their betters. Others were the inadequately protected and poorly disciplined ashigaru. Some daimyo, however – the more successful ones, as future events would demonstrate – had begun to organize their ashigaru in disciplined fighting units, retaining them in their service beyond any immediate campaign and even entrusting them with the traditional samurai weapons of bows and spears with which to bring down enemy samurai from their horses.

This positive attitude towards ashigaru was a vision of the future for Japanese warfare in which the newly arrived Portuguese merchants would play an unexpected role, because in 1543 they had brought with them some matchlock muskets, a type of firearm also called an arquebus. The Shimazu daimyo of Satsuma Province (modern-day Kagoshima Prefecture) where the Portuguese first landed had immediately appreciated the implication of these weapons, which were far superior to the simple Chinese handguns then being used in Japan. Within a few years daimyo elsewhere in Japan would be deploying home-produced Japanese matchlock muskets on battlefields and during castle attacks and using them to good effect. This study traces how that important development came about and how it helped disciplined foot soldiers to confront mounted samurai.

Three key battles fought by the Takeda family – one of Japan's greatest samurai clans – illustrate the shift in thinking that brought about Japan's infantry revolution. The elite mounted warriors of the Takeda fought under their illustrious leader Takeda Shingen Harunobu and provide the best examples in Japanese history of classic mounted samurai warfare, although quite early on in his career Shingen (the Buddhist name by which he is commonly known) had begun to appreciate the potential of disciplined ashigaru. That realization was given shocking confirmation in the first case





A beautiful example of an ornate *teppō* (matchlock musket or arquebus). Introduced into Japan by the Portuguese in 1543, matchlock muskets would revolutionize Japanese warfare when they were deployed correctly, and that required a sensible use of the lower-class ashigaru, who could be trained to fire them in massive and disciplined volleys.

study in this book: the battle of Uedahara in 1548, when mounted samurai from the Takeda suffered a reversal against the ashigaru spearmen and archers of the Murakami clan. All that either side had then in the way of firearms were a handful of simple Chinese handguns that may not even have been used. In the second case study, the battle of Mikata ga Hara in 1573, Shingen's horsemen faced squads of ashigaru armed with European-style firearms alongside archers and spearmen, although the battlefield environment prevented them from being used effectively. Instead, Mikata ga Hara became the last triumph of Shingen's mounted samurai against disordered ashigaru. The situation then changed dramatically in the year 1575 when, ironically, it would be the Takeda's greatest enemy – an up-and-coming young daimyo called Oda Nobunaga – who would show Japan how to deploy lower-class troops in the most effective manner. The mounted samurai of the Takeda under Shingen's son and heir Takeda Katsuyori were defeated at the ensuing battle of Nagashino where the disciplined firepower and defensive spears of lowly ashigaru played a key role.

Modern reproductions of the fences used by Oda Nobunaga's matchlock musketeers at Nagashino, looking from within them across the valley where the Takeda horsemen charged in 1575. The fields are full of young rice plants. The three battles examined in this book were fought on flat plains containing fertile paddy fields that would be used otherwise for producing rice, and the men who grew the food for the samurai were the same men who would fight for and against them as ashigaru. Rice is cultivated in carefully maintained paddy fields that require intensive work, so the usual campaigning season for Japanese warfare began once the harvest had been gathered and the cooler winds had allowed the fields to dry out and harden. This was the environment in which samurai fought ashigaru: their enemies on the battlefield but the producers of the food that everyone needed.



The Opposing Sides

STATUS, RECRUITMENT AND MOTIVATION

The samurai

In social terms the samurai cherished an ideal of themselves as a landowning military aristocracy who could leave the business of farming to others, although it would not be until around the 1590s that it became the norm for a member of the samurai class to be defined solely as someone who did nothing but fight. Otherwise they were mainly *jizamurai* (samurai of the land) who combined the roles of warrior and owner of a smallholding and would not be too proud to get their hands dirty in a paddy field. It would be personal opportunity or promotion gained by bravery on the battlefield that enabled a *jizamurai* to move closer to the ideal of the perfect mounted warrior who had the wealth and connections to live exclusively as a military gentleman: a status that was then really only enjoyed by a daimyo's family members or his long-standing hereditary retainers.

On the battlefield these proud elite samurai were the knights of Old Japan, and just like the European knights they placed a huge emphasis on tradition and precedence when it came to waging war. Their imaginations were fed by numerous heroic tales of their ancestors, whose exploits had grown considerably in the telling. These almost legendary figures had been noble mounted archers with close imperial connections, who – so the stories related – fought only with worthy opponents whom they would challenge to single combat in the midst of a battle. If victorious they would take their enemy's head; if defeated they would commit honourable suicide. It is true that instances of *ikki uchi* (single horseman fighting) still occurred during the Sengoku Period, but they now tended only to be curtain-raisers to a battle or a siege, where a successful challenge in view of everyone could greatly influence morale. When the armies actually clashed something approaching mass cavalry deployment was the norm for samurai warfare.

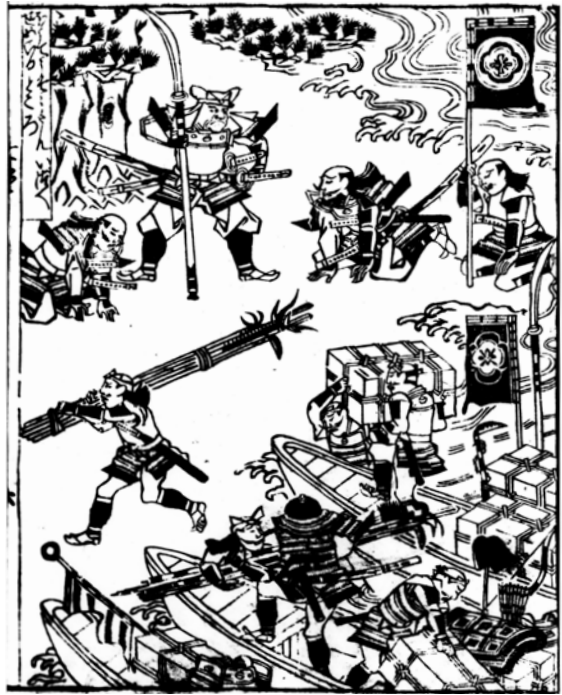


ABOVE LEFT

This beautifully made Japanese doll depicts Honda Tadakatsu, the loyal follower of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who fought at both Mikata ga Hara and Nagashino. Honda Tadakatsu was known for wearing a helmet ornamented with stag's antlers. The *Honda mon* (badge) appears on his *sashimono* (back flag). He is the perfect example of the mounted samurai.

ABOVE RIGHT

The support functions performed by a samurai's personal attendants are well shown in this picture from *Hōjō Godai ki* depicting ashigaru in the service of Hōjō Sōun (1432–1519). One has a bundle of pole-arms tied loosely together. Another carries the company flag while others unload boxes of stores from a boat.



The ashigaru

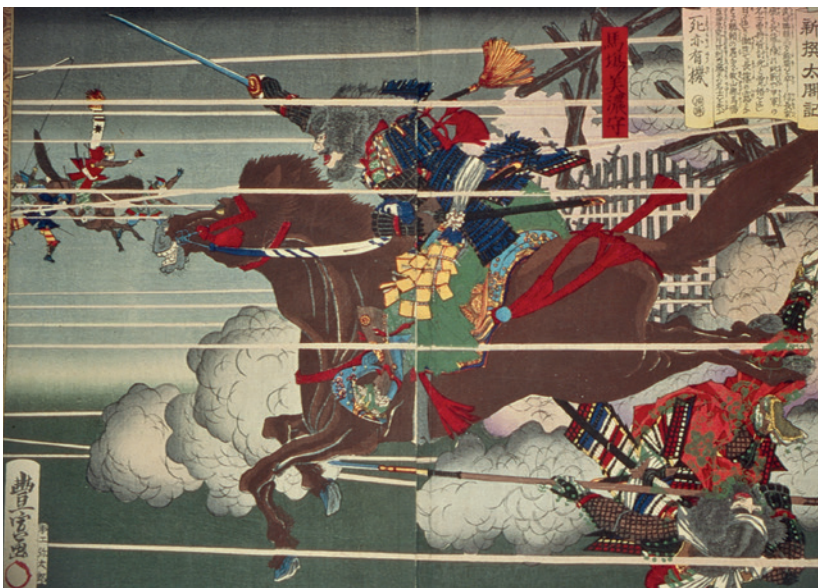
The ultimate origins of the men who made up the ranks of the ashigaru foot soldiers were the rice fields on which everyone's survival depended. Most of Japan's agricultural workers were simple farmers who owned none of the lands on which they worked so hard, but in the chaos of the Sengoku Period an escape from that punishing life could be found by serving a daimyo in war. Some of these willing recruits provided simple yet vital support functions such as baggage carrying, and as many as 40 per cent of the total number of troops in a typical army performed similar non-combatant duties. Those whose origins lay in criminal activities such as mountain banditry or piracy tended to be employed for espionage and infiltration and other high-risk operations: tasks that would eventually give rise to the legends of the ninja. Those men were also given the sordid tasks of abducting other farmers from rival provinces to work a daimyo's fields or of scavenging a battlefield for discarded weapons once the fighting was over, leaving the serious business of warfare to the noble samurai and the trusted foot soldiers who supported them.

At this time in history a foot soldier could achieve glory, reward and even promotion to the samurai ranks by his conduct on the battlefield in the aforementioned roles or in the newly created weapon squads. One enlightened early daimyo from the Asakura family commented that if 1,000 spears could be purchased for the price of one superlative sword then it should be the spears for ashigaru that made their way into the shopping basket rather than the fine sword for a samurai (Sasama 1968: 289). Takeda Shingen fully appreciated that point, and when he took over Kai Province following the deposition of his father in 1541 he began a thorough review of the province's military strength. One realization that he came to was that too much reliance had been placed upon pedigree and ancestry, whereby the fighting strength of the Takeda (as it was



with most other clans) had depended upon a system called *korōtō*, which literally meant 'sons of vassal bands'. To create an army based almost exclusively on the sons of samurai, backed up by casually recruited ashigaru used for menial tasks or fairly disorganized weapon work, was inefficient and unnecessary, so Shingen cast his net wider and offered places in his army to sturdy sons of non-landowning farmers. Military skills and bravery, rather than family connections, allowed these men entry to the ashigaru weapon squads of bows (*yumi-gumi*), spears (*yari-gumi*) and firearms (*teppō-gumi*) and even promotion within the samurai ranks.

Ashigaru were first attracted to armies and fighting because of the prospect of loot, but mundane tasks such as raiding were still assigned to them after they formed weapon squads in a daimyo's army. In this painting we see 'regular' ashigaru doing some official looting on a grand scale on behalf of the Asakura daimyo in 1566. Their spoils even include a temple bell which they have loaded on to a cart.



It is unusual to find a print that shows a samurai charging forwards against a hail of bullets from ashigaru musketeers; the topic was less than flattering for a proud mounted warrior. The figure depicted here is Baba Nobuharu, one of Takeda Shingen's 'Twenty-Four Generals', who was killed during the battle of Nagashino in 1575. Here he rides to his death.

COMMAND, CONTROL AND ORGANIZATION

RIGHT

Takeda Shingen Harunobu (1521–73), the great leader of the much-feared mounted samurai of Kai Province, shown here on a painted scroll in the Nagashino Castle Preservation Hall. He wears his favourite helmet which was ornamented by a plume of white horsehair. Shingen likened himself to the god Fudō Myō-ō ('the immovable wisdom king') who is usually depicted seated on a rock surrounded by flames, holding a sword in his right hand and a coiled rope in his left, and surviving portraits of Shingen show a strong if somewhat corpulent man who projected just such an intimidating image. Yet Shingen was also renowned for the successful way in which he governed his province, and his farmers were certainly not like many of their contemporaries who readily deserted one daimyo for another, but stayed under the protection of their fierce lord and his prosperous economy. Most tellingly, Shingen's headquarters building was not a castle. Instead he ruled from a *yashiki* (mansion) called Tsutsujigasaki, which is now the site of the Takeda Shrine in Kōfu City.

FAR RIGHT

Takeda Katsuyori (1546–82) was the son and heir of Takeda Shingen. Katsuyori was an accomplished general both in carrying out castle attacks and in leading mounted samurai, but he never gained the confidence of the 'Twenty-Four Generals' that Shingen had enjoyed during his lifetime. The campaign of 1575 that led to the battle of Nagashino was conducted against their recommendations and ended in disaster.

The samurai

Every samurai army in Sengoku Period Japan came under the supreme command of its daimyo. He was the head of the family and would certainly be present on the battlefield during a major campaign unless age or injury forced him to remain behind. The presence of two rival daimyo was a factor in each of the three battles described in this book. Very little is known about the command structure under Murakami Yoshikiyo (1501–73) at Uedahara, but, as the following pages will show, it proved to be very effective and probably differed little from the well-documented organization of his enemies the Takeda, whose tried-and-tested model is described in detail in the great Takeda chronicle called *Kōyō Gunkan*. At Uedahara and Mikata ga Hara the Takeda army fought under the great Takeda Shingen Harunobu (1521–73), whose influence would last beyond his death and whose brooding, ghostly presence may be discerned even at Nagashino. Shingen's military leadership was characterized by a strategic vision that went far beyond the immediate tactical needs of any current battle, of which there would be many. Shingen also inspired his men, receiving decades of loyalty from his chiefs of staff known popularly as the Takeda 'Twenty-Four Generals'.

The command structure immediately below the daimyo was fairly common whichever clan is under discussion; Murakami Yoshikiyo, Tokugawa Ieyasu and Oda Nobunaga each had their own equivalent (and number) of the Takeda's 'Twenty-Four Generals'. These *taishō* (generals) were the *crème de la crème* of the elite samurai who were closest to the daimyo and were called his *hatamoto* (those who stand beneath the flag), an expression that could be taken literally on the battlefield. As part of the daimyo's 'household division', the top generals occupied senior administrative and leadership roles, ranging



from strategic planning to communications, while hundreds more samurai and ashigaru stood 'under the flag' as the daimyo's personal bodyguard. If the account of a particular battle tells us that an attack has penetrated the ranks of a daimyo's *hatamoto* then it is clear that a very serious situation has developed.

The units in which the *hatamoto* served were usually called *ban* (guards), and their ranks included the elite *go umamawari-shū* (Horse Guards) whose role was not merely that of protecting the daimyo, because they led some of the fiercest recorded attacks in history. The *hatamoto* also included *kachi* (Foot Guards) and *koshō*, whose title can be suitably translated as 'squires' or 'pages'. The latter were often the sons of retainers, but the duties assigned to these young men were far from ceremonial because they fought within the *hatamoto* as part of their training for higher office.

Some of the most senior generals had commanding roles over the samurai on the battlefield, and most of the samurai serving under these *samurai-taishō* were assigned to groups varying in size from ten to 100 men, although it is often difficult to ascertain their exact numbers on any particular battlefield because they would always be accompanied by their own *kinju* (followers). These men were not assigned to other units but stayed to support their personal leaders. They appear on painted screens as little clusters of loyal samurai and foot soldiers standing around their masters as bodyguards and servants, and would have been provided by the retainer himself as part of his obligation to the daimyo. A samurai of even the most modest means would have had at least one armed servant. *Ki*, the counting suffix for horsemen, therefore referred to the *kiba musha-gumi* (man-and-horse samurai group), rather than just the individual mounted warrior.

To some extent the command-and-control structure of the fighting samurai was a very fragmented one when compared to the rigid discipline that had to be used for the ashigaru. A general in charge of elite samurai had



Tokugawa Ieyasu, daimyo of the Mikawa and Tōtōmi provinces, who was defeated by Takeda Shingen at the battle of Mikata ga Hara in 1573, is shown here on a painted hanging scroll in the Nagashino Castle Preservation Hall. The museum is built on the site of the Takeda's greatest defeat, a battle in which Ieyasu would participate.

A hanging scroll in the Nagashino Castle Preservation Hall showing the 'Twenty-Four Generals' of the Takeda under their leader Shingen. The term 'Twenty-Four Generals' is in fact a later invention, but the chain of command of the Takeda did indeed pass through this group of men between about 1540 and 1582. They were all leaders of mounted samurai apart from those who had special responsibility for the ashigaru, an honourable position nevertheless. The group's composition would change greatly over time (two early members were killed at Uedahara in 1548), but their devoted service never changed. On the battlefield they commanded the Takeda divisions of vanguard, main body, wings and rear guard where they excelled above everything else in the traditional samurai skills of mounted warfare.



to cope with supreme individualists who were more used to giving orders than receiving them. They may have been loyal to the point of death, but the demands of personal glory were always present, and a particular samurai's personal attendants would be more cognizant of their master's needs than their own place in any overall strategy. Orders flowed down from the daimyo using drums, conch shells, signalling flags and through the highly mobile mounted *tsukai-ban* (Courier Guards), but at the end of the chain of samurai command there were no packed ranks of European-style cavalry but mixed groups of proud warriors and their followers. As we shall see, the fate of Shingen's general Itagaki Nobukata at Uedahara bore a direct relationship to this very loose composition and command structure.

Oda Nobunaga (1534–82) was the first of Japan's unifiers. He was ahead of his time in his appreciation of the potential of the use of firearms on the Japanese battlefield, and implemented his ideas in a very successful form at the battle of Nagashino in 1575, where his ashigaru musketeers broke the charge of the mounted samurai of the Takeda.

The ashigaru

As in the case of the aforementioned samurai organizations, the well-documented structure of the Takeda army's ashigaru corps was probably typical of any daimyo who properly appreciated the contribution his lower-class recruits could make. It was noted earlier that Takeda Shingen cast his net widely in seeking out military talent, but his innovative recruitment programme of local farmers did not mean that class distinction was abolished, because the new recruits from the villages were placed in appropriate units





under the overall command of officers who were drawn from the samurai ranks under the overall *ashigaru-taishō* (general of ashigaru), in which role several of his ‘Twenty-Four Generals’ served proudly. Saigusa Moritomo, who was killed at the battle of Nagashino, was an *ashigaru-taishō*. Similar structures were found in other daimyo armies.

Under the *ashigaru-taishō* and his samurai assistants were two ranks of officers of ashigaru status who were broadly equivalent to NCOs. The *kashira* (senior officer) would normally have command of companies that were homogeneous in terms of weaponry, so they were therefore usually referred to as ‘weapon’-*kumigashira* (‘group leaders’) using one of the three prefixes *yumi*- (bow), *yari*-(spear) or *teppō*-(musket). For much of the Sengoku Period matchlock muskets and bows were mixed up together, with the archers being required to keep up the fire while the musketeers were reloading, as is illustrated by *Kōyō Gunkan*, which notes a unit of ‘ten *teppō* and five bows’ at one stage in the Takeda army’s development (Sasama 1969: 72).

Serving under the *kashira* were the *kogashira* (literally ‘lesser leaders’). To give an example, in one particular section of *Kōyō Gunkan* one ashigaru *kumigashira* has five *kogashira* serving under him to command his company of 75 archers and 75 musketeers, so that each *kogashira* had responsibility for 30 men (Sasama 1969: 72). In the case of mixed squads of archers and musketeers the *teppō-kogashira* would work in close conjunction with the archers’ own *yumi-kogashira*, whose responsibilities included judging the distance between

ABOVE LEFT

This illustration from the 17th-century *Zōhyō Monogatari* shows a *teppō-kogashira*, who would have had immediate command over a group of ashigaru musketeers. He is ready for his duties with a spare fuze cord wrapped around his left arm and a bamboo *marshaku* (ranging pole) with which to judge distance between his squad and the advancing enemy horsemen.

ABOVE RIGHT

In this detail from *Ehon Taikō ki* ashigaru musketeers, wearing headbands rather than helmets, discharge their weapons from a kneeling position. The musketeers who operated during the four decades after 1540 are likely to have been dressed as simply as these musketeers.

his archers and their target in order to give them the appropriate command. To help him predict the range the *yumi-kogashira* carried a bamboo *mashaku* (ranging pole). He also ensured that there was a steady supply of arrows from the storage boxes. Similarly, the *teppō-kogashira* also used a ranging pole to judge distance for the firearms and would oversee the distribution of bullets, which were stored in large bullet boxes carried by other ashigaru and then transferred to the bullet pouches worn at the musketeers' belts. He would also have around his left arm one or more spare smouldering fuzes in case any musketeer's fuze became extinguished.

The first exchange of fire on a battlefield was likely to be between the rival musket troops, firing at a maximum range of about 100m. As the *ashigaru-taishō* was probably in the most forward position of the samurai commanders, he would be able to judge when the initial firing had disorientated the enemy sufficiently for a charge to be ordered. At this point, according to theory, the ashigaru spearmen would advance and the samurai would attack on foot or from horseback. While this was going on the ashigaru missile troops would be reorganized by the *kashira* under the protection of other ashigaru spearmen. Throughout all of these operations the *ashigaru-taishō's* judgement was crucial, and Sasama notes an interesting miscalculation involving the musket corps of Ōtomo Yoshimune (1558–1605) during the Korean Invasion of 1592–93. More than 1,200 musketeers discharged their weapons repeatedly at too great a range, leaving them vulnerable to an attack by advancing enemy archers. They were saved by Harada Iyo (a man probably of *kashira* rank), who had made sure that some bullets were kept back in reserve (Sasama 1968: 364).

TACTICS

The samurai

When charging into battle mounted samurai relied on terror, shock and the cutting power of their spears and other edged weapons. According to the writings of various contemporary schools of horsemanship, there were three basic techniques of mounted warfare to be found on a typical battlefield. The first was called *norikomi* ('ride and enter'), where horsemen acted essentially as *monomi* (scouts) to carry out a reconnaissance-in-force, riding into the enemy lines and fighting only briefly before rapidly withdrawing. The second was *norikiri* ('ride and cut'), where horsemen were sent into a breach created in the enemy lines by missile fire to exploit the disorder. Finally, *norikuzushi* ('ride and destroy') was the classic cavalry charge whereby mounted samurai assaulted the lines of enemy ashigaru to break and overrun them by their impact.

Norikuzushi was traditionally regarded as a tactic in which the Takeda excelled, a mode of warfare in which Shingen and his army enjoyed an enviable reputation that went far back into the wider history of Eastern Japan (Tanaka 1997: 108). The flat lands around the Kantō plain had always been famous for breeding horses and as early as the Nara Period (710–794) reference was being made to the speedy 'black horses of Kai Province' (Maruta 1988: 170). This



reputation continued into the Sengoku Period. Neither the sound of guns nor the smell of burning frightened the Takeda mounts, but it is important to note that Japanese horses at the time of Shingen were smaller than the ones we see today in samurai films. This was confirmed in 1989 when archaeologists excavated a horse's skeleton from the site of Takeda Shingen's mansion at Tsutsujigasaki in modern-day Kōfu City. Its height to the shoulder was just under 1.2m and its weight was estimated as 250kg, which compares to 1.6m and 500kg for a modern thoroughbred.

So of what did a 'cavalry charge' consist when it was delivered by these horses? First, they would gallop more slowly than the horses used in samurai films, and as the samurai steed had to carry an armoured rider the velocity and momentum of a charge would be that much less than that of a modern racehorse. Mounted samurai nevertheless had the ability to deliver a considerable shock, although Japanese cavalry actions would have produced nothing like the impact of European knights in full body armour and carrying stout lances. A further hindrance was the fact that each samurai horseman would also be accompanied by his personal attendants running as fast as they could, whom a samurai tried not to leave behind. The names such as 'spear carrier' that were given to these men were not honorary titles but descriptions of actual functions carried out as part of the small supportive fighting unit. Other warriors who fought dismounted would also be needed to exploit any breach created by a mounted charge, so mounted samurai operating in a *norikuzushi* manner would not wish to get too far in front of their troops following on foot. The distinction found during, say, the Napoleonic era between cavalry and infantry was

ABOVE LEFT

In this detail from *Ehon Toyotomi Kunkoki* a mounted samurai moves into battle supported by his personal attendants. He is particularly well supported by a squad of musketeers. In front one ashigaru carries a bale of rice. Another ashigaru is his personal standard bearer.

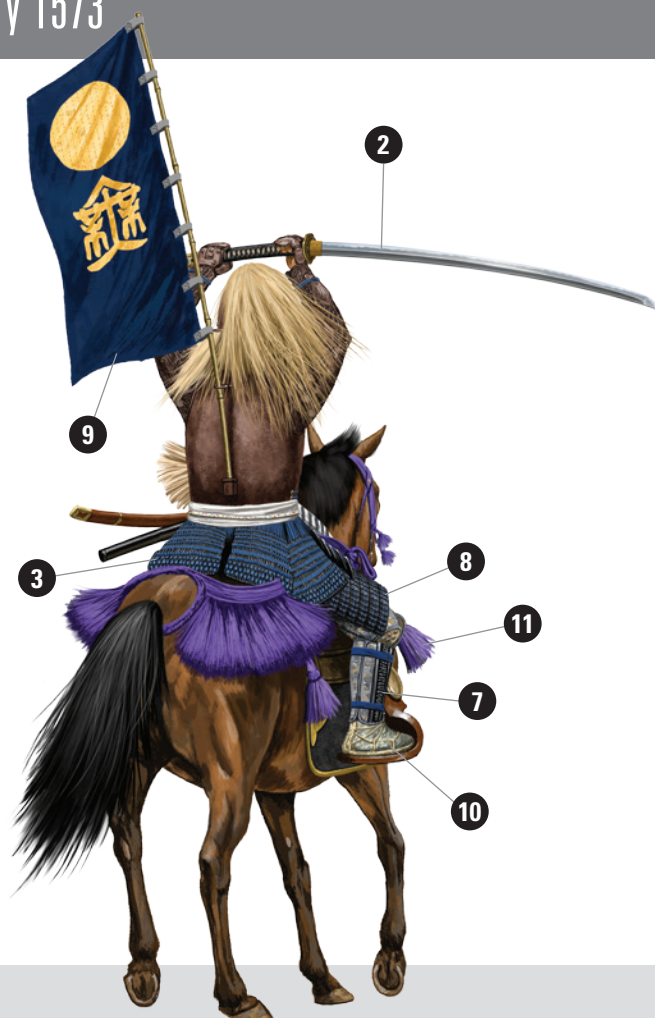
ABOVE RIGHT

On this painted screen of the battle of Sekigahara (1600) in the Watanabe Museum in Tottori a mounted samurai is shown with his typical band of personal followers of ashigaru rank. They would include weapon carriers, grooms, servants and bodyguards. The samurai, in a suitably fine suit of armour, is mounting his horse from the left side.



This haughty and magnificent figure is Sakakibara Yasumasa (1548–1606), one of Tokugawa Ieyasu's *shitenno* ('Four Guardian Kings'), the closest to their leader among Ieyasu's *hatamoto* (those who stand beneath the flag). Sakakibara Yasumasa fought at Anegawa (1570), Mikata ga Hara, Nagashino and Sekigahara (1600). His sneering expression makes him the epitome of the proud samurai who is ready and waiting to cut down enemy ashigaru using his weapon of choice: a *nodachi*.

Mikata ga Hara, 25 January 1573



Weapons, dress and equipment

Sakakibara Yasumasa is well-armed with a sword (1) slung blade-downwards (*tachi*-style) from his belt and a large *nodachi* (extra-long sword; 2).

As befitted their elite status, mounted samurai such as Yasumasa had always tried to look suitably splendid, although the *yoroi* style of armour – highly elaborate, multi-laced and multi-coloured rigid box-like armour with leather breastplate – once favoured by the mounted archers of the 12th century had now usually been replaced by a simpler type termed *dō-maru* armour. The absence of knots and small plates of armour provided fewer opportunities for an ashigaru spearman to make contact using a weapon and pull the rider from his horse. Shoulder guards and leg armour were also contoured, while the samurai's arms were enclosed in mail and plate sleeves that were very similar to those of an ashigaru. Yasumasa has, however, gone one better in terms of wearing a smoothly contoured armour, because his suit is based on a converted Portuguese breastplate called a *namban-dō* ('Southern Barbarian body armour') to which have been attached protective tassets (3) in the Japanese style called *kusazuri* ('grass rubbing'). Yasumasa is known to have owned this actual suit of armour which is now in Tokyo National Museum. The breastplate is lacquered to give it a russet-iron finish, as is the *namban kabuto*

(European helmet; 4). Both were probably bullet-proof, and in typically flamboyant Japanese fashion the very plain helmet is adorned with a white horsehair plume. The *sode* (shoulder guards; 5) are very small. The *kote* (sleeves; 6), *suneate* (shin guards; 7) and *haidate* (thigh guards; 8) are all of a very basic and practical design that would have been worn by hundreds of samurai at the time, not just a general.

It was customary for samurai to wear a *sashimono* (back flag; 9) on the back of the armour. Normally this would bear a simple and common design that indicated the wearer's unit. The device on it was often modelled on the family *mon* (badge), but as Yasumasa is a high-ranking commander his *sashimono* is unique to him alone, so he would have been instantly recognizable on the battlefield. Its shaft lay within a holder attached to the rear of the armour.

From the knees downwards Yasumasa is wearing apparel that all samurai shared with the ashigaru, including the useful and comfortable straw sandals (10). His horse has quite simple trappings that are typical of the age. The silken tassels (11) are largely decorative, but hanging down on either side of the saddle are two stout panels of leather (12) ornamented with gilt fittings. Their purpose is to protect the horse from being struck by the rider's heavy iron *abumi* (stirrups; 13), slung from adjustable leather straps.

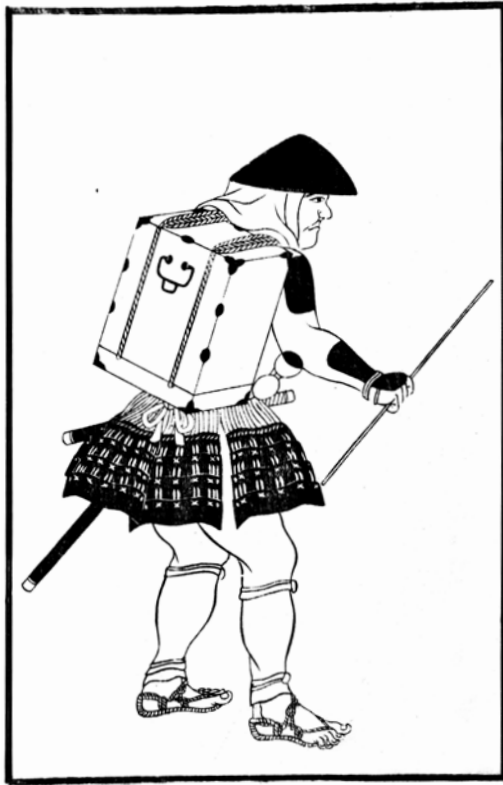
therefore by no means so clear-cut on a Sengoku Period battlefield, nor were the operations of the Takeda *kiba gundan* (mounted war-band) anything like the cavalry tactics of Mongol horsemen. The other consideration that would reduce the impact of a cavalry charge was of course the fact that as the samurai galloped into action the enemy ashigaru would be launching volleys of arrows and bullets towards them.

Even if the charging horseman survived the initial onslaught of arrows and bullets to engage at close quarters with the enemy, his opponent would not necessarily be another samurai who wished to engage him in honourable single combat as the legends related. Instead he would be more likely to encounter a small group of ashigaru intent on dragging him off his horse and stabbing him to death. Such a tragic end was of course directly related to the other factor that a Japanese general had to contend with: the samurai love for personal glory and the means of achieving it that were directly linked to the ancestral accomplishments noted earlier. It was not unheard of for a samurai horseman to deviate from the overall attack plan and go his own way to take the head of a promising opponent. If he was unsuccessful in this the isolated horseman could fall prey to a counter-attack by small groups of enemy ashigaru, as would happen to Itagaki Nobukata at the battle of Uedahara.

The ashigaru

The oldest established ashigaru group technique was that of deploying archers, because for many centuries bows and arrows had been the sole missile weapons deployed on Japanese battlefields apart from a few isolated incidents of stone-throwing. Their importance hardly decreased when firearms were introduced, and in *Hōjō Godai ki* we read, 'At this time guns were few but bows were many ... They took note of a ranging arrow and fired bundles of arrows into the enemy ranks and disordered them' (Sasama 1968: 288). In the 1575 Uesugi muster rolls 1,018 ashigaru archers are listed beside only 321 musketeers. Occasionally we hear of archers acting as skirmishers or even sharpshooters, but the daimyo who deployed the ashigaru bowmen squads knew that the Hōjō's 'bundles of arrows' delivered in a coordinated manner was the best way to use archers against a mounted samurai charge or even an isolated individual horseman. Ideally, the arrow fire from the archer groups only began when the enemy samurai were within 50m range, but fear could drive archers to loose their arrows at threatening ranks of horsemen when they were as far as 150m away, so discipline was essential, as was a good supply of arrows. Ammunition was stored in large boxes called *yabako* that each held 100 arrows and were carried on another ashigaru's back. Because an archer whose arrows were spent was a vulnerable target the arrows in an archer's personal quiver would be left unused until the last moment, when the ashigaru might well be within touching distance of a hostile samurai's spear blade.

From 1543 onwards a greater firepower could be provided by the musketeers. When Portuguese matchlock muskets were first introduced into Japan in 1543 they may have been seen as prestige weapons for individual samurai, but things would soon change and the matchlock musket became regarded as primarily an ashigaru weapon. Over the next half-century the



ashigaru *teppō-gumi* (musket squads) gradually replaced the *yumi-gumi* (archery squads) as the main ranged-combat squads in a daimyo's army. The matchlock muskets they used were mass-produced and improved Japanese copies of the Portuguese originals. They were slow to load and inaccurate, but once their correct deployment was understood they became a huge asset because of their long range and the absence of a need for the years of training required to produce good archers. As skills developed cartridges were introduced, thus speeding up the process of loading, but these had not been invented by the time of Nagashino.

The third category of weapon squad – the ashigaru *yari-gumi* (spear squads) – almost always outnumbered all the missile troops within an army. Oda Nobunaga's *yari-gumi* made up 27 per cent of his ashigaru fighting force, compared to 13.5 per cent for the musketeers. Discipline was every bit as essential for the *yari-gumi* as it was for the missile troops. They may never have employed the 'push of pike' that occurred in contemporary Europe – a technique whereby rival hedgehogs of men collided, stuck fast and tried to force their opponents back – but close-rank fighting techniques were used, even if accounts of Japanese warfare suggest they involved much more fluid movement than was the case in European infantry warfare.

The spearmen would make ready by removing the scabbards from their spear blades and placing them in their belts or down their armour. They would then stand shoulder to shoulder, trying to keep their spear points in line and awaiting the command 'Uteya!', which means 'thrust'. If their opponents were other ashigaru the aim was to break their ranks and disorder

ABOVE LEFT

An ashigaru carrying the bullet box to supply his comrades in the *teppō-gumi* (musket squad). As well as the ammunition, he has a spare ramrod in case that of a musketeer should break in action. The picture is from *Zōhyō Monogatari*.

ABOVE RIGHT

A small group of ashigaru from about the 1540s are shown in this detail from *Ehon Taikō ki*. It illustrates the changes in weaponry that happened when ashigaru began to be valued and disciplined. They are well armed: one has a matchlock musket and another a bow, and the others wave swords bravely. They are wearing simple armour, although only one has head protection in the form of the ashigaru's *jingasa* (war hat).



This plate shows a typical ashigaru musketeer from the Takeda weapon squads at about the time of Mikata ga Hara. Still somewhat despised by the elite samurai, the ashigaru's inferior status is noticeable even in the physical state of this former farmer, because he is shorter in stature than Sakakibara Yasumasa, and his prematurely aged face shows nothing of the fine breeding of the upper classes. Nevertheless, as a musketeer he is something of an elite figure among the ashigaru. He has prepared his equipment carefully for action, and on the front of his *jingasa* and breastplate appears the *mon* of the Takeda family in which he serves proudly

Mikata ga Hara, 25 January 1573



Weapons, dress and equipment

This musketeer ashigaru is lightly armed and highly mobile. He is equipped with a matchlock musket (1), its fuze (2), a bullet pouch (3) two swords (4) and a powder flask (5). Spare ramrods (6) are held in the musket's leather case which now protrudes from his belt.

He is protected by a very plain *okashi-gusoku* ('munitions armour') without *haidate* (thigh guards). The first ashigaru who turned up to join a daimyo's armies would either have supplied their own home-made armour or wore old suits pilfered from former battlefields and stored in the villages. The daimyo who offered ashigaru regular employment strove towards a more uniform appearance and a better form of protection, although no ashigaru armour was ever of the quality worn by the samurai. It would instead be just a simple *okashi gusoku* ('loan armour' or 'munitions armour') usually of the *okegawa-dō* (barrel-shaped) style of a plain breastplate (7) with short *kusazuri* (hanging tassels; 8). Armoured sleeves might be included,

but the biggest difference in appearance and protection came with the helmet. The ashigaru wore only a simple iron *jingasa* (war hat; 9), which was usually shaped like a lampshade and had a cloth neck guard hanging from the rear to shade his neck from the sun if not from sword strokes. The members of the ashigaru weapon squads were identifiable on the battlefield under a common *hata-jirushi* (unit banner) together with some form of personal identification device such as a company flag, although in this particular case the ashigaru bears the clan's *mon* (badge; 10) stencilled with lacquer on his armour and helmet.

Underneath his armour are short trousers (11) and a shirt that provide a little padding. He wears straw sandals (12) just like the samurai. His other equipment includes a bamboo water bottle (13), spare sandals (14) and a 'necklace' of ration bags (15), each containing rice for one meal.



ABOVE LEFT

This illustration from *Zōhyō Monogatari* shows the ashigaru whose responsibility it was to carry the *yabako* (arrow box) which contained 100 arrows for the archery squads. The *yumi-gumi* archers would use these arrows first in battle, keeping the ones in their quivers for use only at the last moment.

ABOVE RIGHT

A member of the ashigaru *yumi-gumi* is shown here in an illustration from *Zōhyō Monogatari*. He is stringing his bow. Note his fur-covered quiver and the spare bowstring reel hanging from his belt. Archers were the only missile troops in Japanese armies until the introduction of matchlock muskets in 1543.

them by inflicting as many casualties as possible. The spearmen would then be ordered to the flanks to let samurai through. The ashigaru spearmen might be allowed to take part in a pursuit, but their long spears would have been clumsy weapons for such encounters so it was normal for them to be pulled back into a new formation. If the spearmen's opponents were mounted samurai and there was nothing in the way of field defences such as were built at Nagashino, the cavalry charge would be received by the spearmen from a kneeling position. At the right moment they would be ordered to stand and, just like the musketeers, they would direct their weapons at the riders' horses. The dismounted samurai would then be left to be finished off (and his prized head collected) by the samurai. *Zōhyō Monogatari* states:

When facing an attack by horsemen line up on one knee, lie the spear down and wait. When contact is imminent lift up the spear head to a level with the area of the horse's breast. When the point pierces the skin hold on to it. Whether you are cutting at men and horses, it may be that you will feel you are being forced to pull out the spear, and it is a general rule to stand fast to the bitter end and not throw the cooperative operation into disorder. (Sasama 1969: 68)

Ashigaru spearmen had much more freedom of movement and action when pursuing a disordered enemy, and it is on occasions like these (of which all three selected battles provide good examples) that we read of isolated samurai being surrounded by ashigaru spearmen acting in small groups rather than in long organized ranks. *Zōhyō Monogatari* provides a particularly vivid instance:

Believing that I would be hit if I attacked him from the left I came at him from the right, taking a firm grip on the shaft of my spear and aiming at the horse's

rump. I tried to judge the best place to strike where it would not hit one of the horse's bones. I tried to stab it around the base of the tail, but when the spear blade met the horse it bounced off and flew about five ken away, and I slipped and fell down. If I had still been holding on to the spear when I fell the horse would have run off, but luckily I had let go of it as I fell and it made the horse stumble and collapse. The enemy fell off facing upwards so I could cut his head off with ease. (Sasama 1968: 367)

WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

The samurai

The collision between mounted samurai and masses of ashigaru on most Sengoku Period battlefields meant that the ideal world of honourable single combat which the samurai had imbibed from legends could hardly ever be realized in the press of battle, and the 16th-century mounted samurai's weaponry reflected one aspect of that harsh reality. Sengoku Period samurai had been fed on tales of mounted archery, and there were still a few samurai whose preferred individual weapon was the traditional *yumi* (longbow). Mounted archery was, however, a skill that required constant practice, and the use of bows from horseback was not conducive to the success of *norikuzushi* tactics, so the vast majority of the Takeda samurai wielded a pole-arm of some sort. The usual samurai *yari* (spear) – normally called a *mochi yari* (held spear) to distinguish it from the longer

The use of a *nodachi*, an extra-long type of sword, is shown here in a modern painting on the site of the battle of Anegawa in 1570. Makara Jūrōzaemon was a man of exceptional strength, which allowed him to wield this very clumsy weapon from a horse's back. In the rear an ashigaru is flung backwards by the impact.



ashigaru weapon – was about 4m long, and an interesting and authentic example of one presented to Hattori Hanzō by Tokugawa Ieyasu is still preserved in Tokyo. Its original shaft length was 3.1m, and originally it had a long blade (now broken) of 1.27m. The total length of the weapon was therefore 4.38m, of which the blade made up just over one-quarter. The weight of the remaining parts is 7.5kg, indicating that the original weight was about 12kg.

Mochi-yari were highly versatile weapons when wielded by strong and well-practised samurai. Spears could be couched like European lances but were far more likely to be swung freely from the saddle. When attacking another mounted samurai the greatest level of spear control was achieved by having one's opponent on one's left. The spear would be held with the right hand across the body, while the left hand controlled the horse. Otherwise the spear was held out to the side of the horse in the right hand and swung either in huge slashing strokes or with more delicacy and precision as a thrusting weapon. When attacking ashigaru or other samurai on foot a stabbing spear could be used like the lance of a Napoleonic-era light cavalryman, and there are illustrations of mounted samurai 'pig-sticking' unfortunate ashigaru on the ends of their spear blades. The momentum of the thrust could well lift the unfortunate victim into the air.

Other horsemen preferred the heavier types of pole-arms that were primarily cutting weapons rather than thrusting ones. These included *naginata* (glaives), which had a spear shaft on which was mounted a short curved blade; a *nagamaki* (a *naginata* with blade and shaft of equal length); or a *nodachi*, a very long sword that only a strongly built expert could wield from the saddle. All these weapons needed two hands rather than one, so it is difficult to see how they could be used at full gallop. We may therefore envisage them being used when the mounted samurai was engaged in a *mêlée* after the initial charge. One of his weapon carriers would exchange his master's *yari* for, say, a *nodachi*. The samurai would then wield the *nodachi* while two grooms steadied his horse for him. A classic example of *nodachi* use is the devastation wrought at the battle of Anegawa in 1570 by the giant Makara Jūrōzaemon, who lopped off limbs and heads as he swung the monstrous weapon from his saddle. When fighting ashigaru with these weapons the samurai would cut down at their opponent, just as would be done with a horseman's very sharp *katana* (samurai sword): the normal weapon of choice if one's spear was lost or broken. The horseman's elevated position and the forward momentum of the swing would add greatly to the force and cutting power of the descending blade.

Turning to the armour worn by the samurai, contemporary chronicles give a good idea of the effects of arrows and bullets on a samurai's armoured body. A direct arrow-hit between the eyes that avoided the peak of a samurai's helmet and his face mask would probably be instantly fatal, as is related in *Zōhyō Monogatari* in an anecdote about an ashigaru who had exhausted all his arrows but one:

At that moment an enemy approached him with his mouth wide open like a crocodile's, so the ashigaru waited until he was as close as a spear length, and when he was as near as the length of the shaft he loosed the arrow, which pierced the



enemy through his mouth to the back of his neck and into the back plate of his armour. At this the enemy fell to the ground face upwards and the archer beheaded him. (Sasama 1968: 365)

It was far more usual for a samurai to die after sustaining multiple arrow hits. This was largely due to the impressive stopping power of their layers of armour, and the popular image from both woodblock prints and modern movies of a dying samurai crawling along like a porcupine with multiple arrows protruding from him is not too much of an exaggeration. Ashigaru bullets had much the same impact but their effective range was about two-and-a-half times that of arrows, which could kill at up to 30m compared to 50m for a bullet. The extreme range for both weapons was approximately 380m and 500m respectively (Futaki 1989, 16). During the battle of Hataya in 1600, a mounted samurai called Iida Harima-no Kami was felled by a distant bullet that appeared to come from nowhere:

He removed his helmet and gave it to an attendant to hold. Stretching his legs in the stirrups and shading his eyes with one hand he raised himself up, but a bullet

ABOVE LEFT

This is an excellent example of a very practical battledress armour for a samurai of the Sengoku Period. It has small shoulder plates, a bullet-proof layered iron breastplate and a multi-plate helmet with no unnecessary ornamentation.

ABOVE RIGHT

The effects of musket fire on a simple suit of armour are shown dramatically by this specimen on display in Matsumoto City Museum. There are three massive bullet holes in the breastplate.

came from somewhere and struck him on the forehead. The shot made him fall headlong from his horse. His followers were greatly concerned and tried to hold him to make him stand, but he had already died and was now a lifeless corpse. (Imamura 2005: 317)

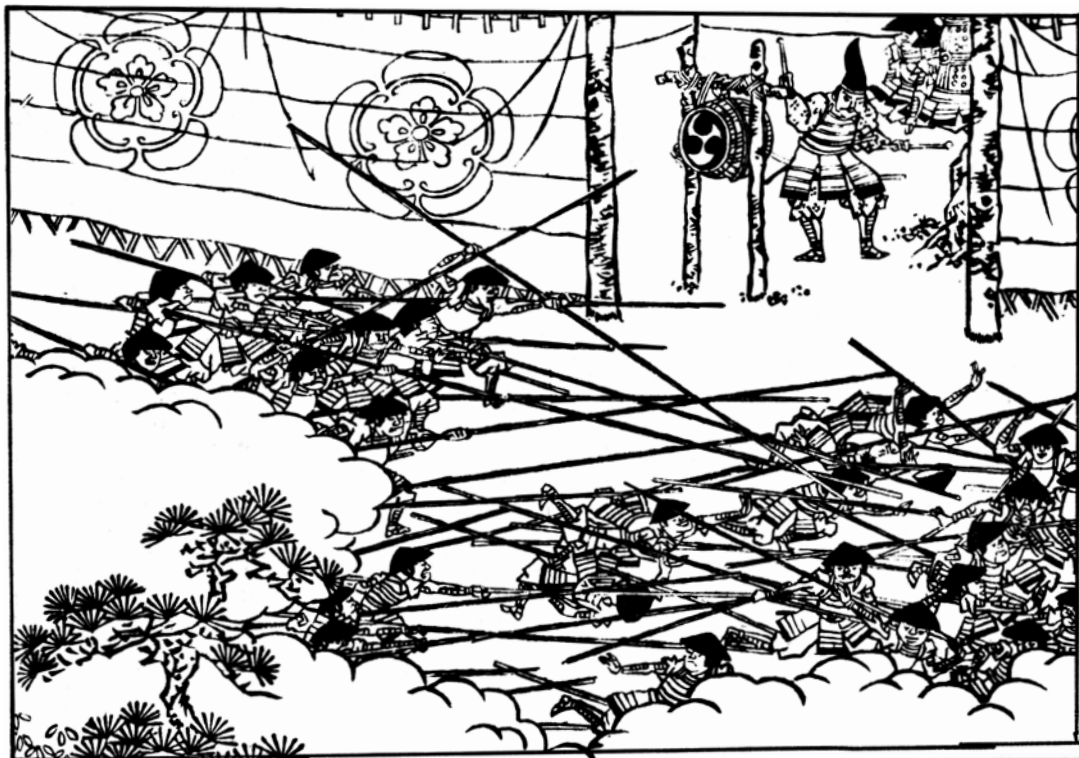
The ashigaru

Ashigaru bows were made from deciduous wood faced with bamboo and lacquered to weatherproof them. The bow was bent against its natural curve and the pull of a bow could be so strong that it needed more than one person to string it. A spare bowstring on a reel would be worn at the archer's belt along with a quiver and a sword. A later development gave the archers the option of 'fixing bayonets' by fastening a small knife to the bow's tip, making it into a rudimentary spear known as a *hazu yari*. There are no descriptions of its use in the war chronicles, however, so the *hazu yari* probably owes its origin to the peaceful Edo Period. An account (possibly fictional) of its use appears in *Zōhyō Monogatari*, when an archer whose arrows have run out stabs an enemy samurai with his *hazu yari* with such force that the blade passes through the victim's face and out of his ear (Sasama 1969: 365).

The matchlock muskets used by the ashigaru produced quite a recoil and a lot of smoke. Unlike the heavier type of firearms that required a rest, however, the matchlock firearms used by the Japanese could be fired from the shoulder. In preparation for firing the leather bag in which the weapon was carried was removed and stuck into the musketeer's belt along with a supply of spare ramrods. Loading a matchlock musket was a slow and precise process. First some priming powder was introduced followed by the main charge and the bullet, which were rammed down. The *hibuta* (touch-hole cover) was then opened and priming powder inserted into the touch hole. After closing the *hibuta* for safety the *hibasami* (serpentine) was cocked and the end of the glowing and smouldering *hinawa* (match) was inserted into its jaws and fixed in place using a peg. If the *hinawa* was dropped in quickly or fitted badly the fire might go out, so a number of spare lighted fuzes were kept on a twig stuck into the ground. The musketeer's own lighted fuze was worn round his left arm and supported by

The fine detail of the spring and trigger of a Japanese matchlock musket. This example is in the Kunitomo Village Gun Museum in Nagahama. The very short stock was held in the right hand. Note the touch-hole cover, which has been closed as it would have been just prior to aiming and firing.





the fourth finger of the left hand. Aim was taken while the *hibuta* was still closed. At the given command it would be flicked open, followed by the order to fire. To save time between reloading the ramrod was not replaced in its hole beneath the barrel but was instead held in the left hand that supported the firearm.

The *yari-gumi* members were armed with *nagae-yari* (long-shafted spears) of three different standard lengths expressed in multiples of *ken*. At the beginning of the Sengoku Period one *ken* was equivalent to 1.6m (the dimensions changed later to 1.8m). A short *te-yari* (hand spear) was one *ken* long. A *niken-yari* (two *ken*) spear was therefore 3.2m long, while a *sangen-yari* (three *ken*) weapon was 4.8m long, similar to the length of a European pike. The longest spears of all were probably to be found in Oda Nobunaga's armies, because there is a reference in *Shinchō-kōki* for April 1553 to '500 3½ *ken* [5.6m] long spears' (Kuwata 1965: 26), although these may have been a 'one-off' as this was the occasion when Nobunaga was trying to impress an ally by his military might. The spears' great length required them to be of composite construction of bamboo strips glued around a core of oak. The entire shaft was lacquered and bound with thread and cloth to provide a secure handgrip, and the almost-finished product was then lacquered one more time. The hilts of the steel blades (which were shorter than the samurai spear blades) were sunk deeply into the upper part of the spear shaft and secured with wooden pegs around a metal 'mouthpiece', with a similar metal butt at the other end. The spear blades might have had a side-blade to help pull a samurai from his horse.

This picture from *Ehon Toyotomi Kunkoki* shows an incident in the life of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98) when he carried out an experiment by matching ashigaru spearmen who were armed with normal-sized *nagae yari* (long-shafted spears) against a squad who had been given extra-long spears. The latter are shown triumphant in the mock battle.

Uedahara

23 March 1548

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

The encounter between Takeda Shingen and Murakami Yoshiakiyo which took place on the plain of Uedahara in 1548 provides an excellent example of a major clash between mounted samurai and ashigaru at a time when the deployment of the matchlock muskets that would become the ashigaru's most important weapon was still very rare. There are, however, a few tantalizing and somewhat confusing references to firearms of some sort, although they seem to have played no role in influencing the outcome of the battle. Instead the records describe several encounters between samurai and groups of enemy ashigaru whose principal weapon was still the bow or the long-shafted spear. One of the latter scenarios – a classic instance of a group ambush by ashigaru spearmen – led to the death of a Takeda general.

The battle of Uedahara was fought in Shinano Province (modern-day Nagano Prefecture) and was an important stage in Takeda Shingen's attempts to take over his immediate neighbours' territories. Shinano Province was originally a 'no man's land' between the Uesugi to the north and the Takeda to the south, and for years the two clans would fight over it, particularly at the famous five battles of Kawanakajima, which were fought between 1553 and 1564. The Takeda had invaded Shinano Province for the first time in 1536 under Shingen's father Nobutora (1494–1574). In 1547, by which time the Takeda had taken over much of southern Shinano Province around Lake Suwa, Shingen made an important gain in the province's Saku Valley when he took the castle of Shiga. The castle covered the mountain pass into western Kōzuke Province that is now the route of the modern Shinkansen ('Bullet Train') to Tokyo. This placed

Shingen very close to the territories of Murakami Yoshikiyo, a key ally of Uesugi Kenshin – the daimyo of Echigo Province and Shingen's deadliest rival.

Greatly alarmed by the Takeda advance, Murakami Yoshikiyo sent a relieving army from Kōzuke Province to aid Shiga, but Takeda Shingen responded with a picked force of 500 troops who ambushed them along the way on the flat plain of Odaihara. He then used psychological pressure by displaying in front of Shiga Castle the heads of about 15 senior samurai and 300 ashigaru that had been taken at the battle. This may have provoked a desperate act of treason among the garrison, because a mysterious fire started within the castle after which an assault began and the castle fell. The women and children from the castle were rounded up and sent to Kōfu where they were sold as slaves in one of the best-documented examples of the practice in Sengoku Period Japan. A samurai's wife apparently commanded five times the price of an ashigaru's wife.

As winter moved towards its end, early in March 1548 Murakami Yoshikiyo mobilized his forces to recapture Shiga Castle and drive the Takeda out of Shinano Province forever. When the news reached Kōfu an army assembled under the personal command of Takeda Shingen. The Takeda advance to Uedahara began on the 1st day of the 2nd lunar month of the 17th Year of Temmon (10 March 1548) when Shingen left Kai Province at its north-western tip. From there his route followed the course of today's Chūō Railway Line towards Lake Suwa, an area that had been occupied by the Takeda since 1542. Shingen's main body of 5,000 men were joined en route by 2,000 more under his general Itagaki Nobukata from Uehara Castle to the east of Suwa. The combined Takeda army then crossed the Daimon Pass over the mountains to the Saku Valley to the north-east. Meanwhile the Murakami army left Yoshikiyo's headquarters at Katsurao and forded the Chikumagawa (Chikuma River) somewhere in the vicinity of today's Sakaki Railway Station. Their subsequent choice of route was dictated partly by caution and partly by geography, because they did not follow the course of the river (which may have been physically impossible along certain stretches) but swung round to the west, crossing the Mitsugashirayama range by the Muroga Pass and descending rapidly to the Chikumagawa again behind the mountain of Shiroyama. After little more than ten days of manoeuvring the rival armies were to be found facing each other on the flat land that was nearest to the Murakami's castles: the plain of Uedahara.



Itagaki Nobukata, one of the Takeda 'Twenty-Four Generals'. Haughty and impetuous, he exemplified the attitude of the mounted samurai of the 1540s. He would be killed on the battlefield of Uedahara in 1548 at the hands of a group of socially inferior ashigaru. This portrait of him is in the Shingen-ko Museum in Enzan.

The Uedahara Campaign, March–April 1548

MAP KEY

- 1 Mid-March:** Having left Kōfu on 10 March, Takeda Shingen advances over the Daimon Pass and into the Saku Valley.
- 2 c.20 March:** Murakami Yoshikiyo leaves Katsurao Castle and fords the Chikumagawa.
- 3 21 March:** Yoshikiyo crosses the Mitsugashirayama range by the Muroga Pass and heads for Uedahara.
- 4 0600hrs, 23 March:** The battle of Uedahara begins with a charge by the Takeda vanguard under Itagaki Nobukata.
- 5 Midday, 23 March:** Itagaki Nobukata is killed and the Murakami attack Takeda Shingen's *hatamoto* (guards).
- 6 Late afternoon, 23 March:** Yoshikiyo disengages his forces.
- 7 Mid-April:** Having remained in camp on the battlefield for 20 days, Shingen leaves and claims a victory.

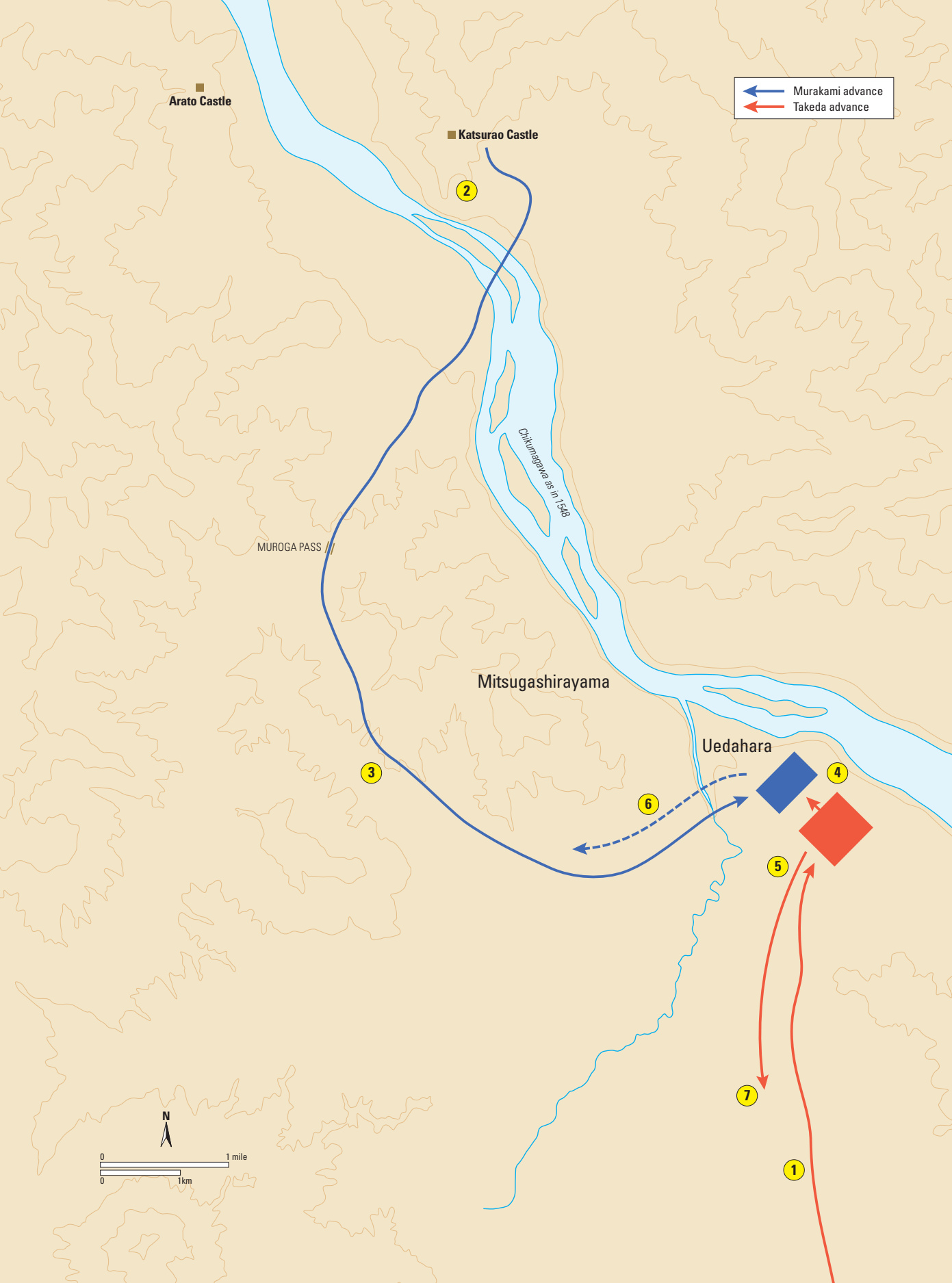
Battlefield environment

The Murakami lands lay where the Chikumagawa broadened its flow around the modern city of Ueda. All three battles in this book were fought on flat lands such as these where the rivers had left their enclosing mountains and had spread out into flood plains. Here settlements and towns had been established, overlooked by a number of *yamashiro* (literally 'mountain castles') that provided the ultimate protection for the local daimyo's patch of land. In the case of Uedahara, Murakami Yoshikiyo's *yamashiro* of Katsurao was Shingen's target. It stood high above the Chikumagawa

facing the smaller castle of Arato across the river on the hills to the west just north of Ueda. Another satellite castle called Toishi lay upriver, but Yoshikiyo chose to descend and engage Shingen on the fertile plain of Uedahara. The battlefield was hemmed in by mountains and the river, greatly restricting an army's movements and conducive to a rapid settlement by means of a fierce attack by mounted samurai who would drive the disordered ashigaru into the river. That was Shingen's plan, but Yoshikiyo had anticipated such a move precisely.



The battlefield of Uedahara looking westwards from the grave of Itagaki Nobukata (1489–1548) towards Shiroyama, the mountain that Murakami Yoshikiyo passed behind on his way to do battle on the plain of Uedahara.



INTO COMBAT

A brief mention of the battle of Uedahara, which was fought on 2m 14d (23 March) is made in the contemporary chronicle *Katsuyama ki*, otherwise known as *Myōhōji ki* from the name of the temple where it was compiled. The account is very short and covers little more than an outline of the events and a list of the most prominent casualties. Much more detail would be provided later in *Kōyō Gunkan*, which contains important information about samurai/ashigaru combat at Uedahara, although like most similar works some of the material in *Kōyō Gunkan* is exaggerated (Nakamura 1965: 40–55). Chapter 27 describes the overall progress of the conflict and parallels *Myōhōji ki*, while the more interesting Chapter 28 consists of a supposed conversation about the battle between Murakami Yoshikiyo and Nagao Kagetora, the future Uesugi Kenshin. After a discussion of the long relationship between the two allies, Kenshin asks Yoshikiyo, ‘How was it with the ‘bows and arrows’ [i.e. the military progress] of Takeda Harunobu?’ Yoshikiyo replies that Takeda Shingen had enjoyed ten years of victories, but that it had now all come to an end. ‘So how was it at the battle of Uedahara?’ continues Kenshin. Yoshikiyo’s reply to that question will shed important light on the theme of this book.

As far as the overall battle of Uedahara is concerned, there are slight discrepancies between the sources over the numbers engaged. In *Myōhōji ki*, Shingen is said to have left Kōfu with 5,000 men and been joined by 2,000 more, making 7,000 in total against the Murakami’s 5,000 men. *Kōyō Gunkan* raises both figures somewhat, but it is fairly safe to say that the battle was fought between two sides that totalled at least 12,000 men of whom almost one-quarter – 2,900 men – would be killed. Crucial to Shingen’s plans was the leader of his vanguard: Itagaki Nobukata (1489–1548), a veteran among the ‘Twenty-Four Generals’ who had been the young Shingen’s mentor. Nobukata fought under a banner of a crescent moon and was above all a skilled leader of mounted samurai. Shingen’s intention was that Nobukata should lead a dramatic charge and sweep the Murakami before them.

Murakami Yoshikiyo had, however, prepared for the battle by carrying out prior surveillance. ‘Within our ranks was an *ashigaru-taishō*, a retainer of the Uesugi from Annaka in Kōzuke Province called Yagi Sōshichirō with his younger brother, who went as scouts (*monomi*) to investigate Itagaki Nobukata’s Kai Province force’ (Nakamura 1965: 54). Yoshikiyo also states that he was fully aware of the reputation of Takeda Shingen and his mounted samurai, because he says that ‘at this battle we were up against Harunobu who was pre-eminent in military matters’; Yoshikiyo notes specifically that the Takeda had ‘two hundred mounted samurai chosen for their skills at horsemanship under commanders of similar ability and holding in their hands two hundred spears’ (Nakamura 1965: 53). So how did Murakami Yoshikiyo counter this threat? He replies, ‘When we got to know of this, to counter the two hundred horsemen with spears we had two hundred spearmen with a horse apiece and also a hundred ashigaru, these men had one hundred long-shafted spears’ (Nakamura 1965: 53). The



latter were clearly members of what was a trained ashigaru *yari-gumi*, but the most interesting information about the Murakami preparations follows immediately afterwards and reads as follows:

To accompany our Horse Guards I chose two hundred skilled marksmen out of the army and to one hundred and fifty of these soldiers we gave five well-made arrows and a bow. To the remaining fifty ashigaru we gave *teppō* that were first imported in the Seventh Year of Eishō [1510] with three bullets per man. They were ordered to shoot when they were told and then to discard them and fight with their swords. I ordered the gunners to fire after the arrows had been shot, and placed an officer in charge of every five men. (Nakamura 1965: 53)

This important statement confirms that hand-picked ashigaru archers were deployed as a *yumi-gumi* in addition to the spearmen, but the most interesting reference is of course the mention of *teppō*. Taken at face value it appears to indicate that Murakami Yoshikiyo was deploying firearms for the first time on a Japanese battlefield, a year before their well-recorded use in 1549 by Ijūin Tadaaki, a vassal of the Shimazu, who used *teppō* during an attack on the castle of Kajiki in Ōsumi Province. There are, however, several very puzzling features about Yoshikiyo's account. The first concerns the firearms themselves. The reference to the year 1510 is quite precise and would appear to rule out any possibility that these firearms were based on the Portuguese matchlock muskets that had arrived only five years before Uedahara in 1543. Instead, the reference to the year reflects an entry in *Hōjō Godai ki*, the chronicle of the Hōjō family:

The view from the reconstructed Arato Castle, looking along the Chikumagawa (Chikuma River). Arato was a satellite castle of Katsurao, the headquarters of Murakami Yoshikiyo (1501–73), which was built on the hill in the left distance. The battle of Uedahara was fought on the flat plain further upstream where the valley in this picture starts to fade from view.

Long ago I heard of a yamabushi called Gyokuryūbo, who lived in Odawara. When he was young he used to climb Mount Ōmine every year. During the final year of the Kyōroku Era [1531], when he arrived at Sakai in Izumi Province he heard a large noise and wondered what it was. He later found out that it was a weapon called a *teppō* which had been introduced from China in the Seventh Year of Eishō [1510]. Realising how marvellous and precious it was, he brought one back for Lord Ujitsuna [i.e. Hōjō Ujitsuna, the second of the Hōjō dynasty, 1487–1541] who tried it out and treasured it. (Hagiwara 1966: 230)

If Yoshikiyo's account is to be taken literally it would mean that the *teppō* used at Uedahara were these primitive Chinese handguns rather than the Portuguese matchlock muskets. Judging by surviving examples, they would have consisted of a short barrel and chamber with a touch hole and a long wooden stock. Double-barrelled and triple-barrelled versions were also used. Although frequently dismissed as both primitive and ineffective, they had been in use for almost a century on the Ryūkyū Islands (modern-day Okinawa) and are likely to have been deployed in battle in Japan itself following their introduction from China in 1510. For example, in 1542, the year before the Portuguese arrived in Japan, 20 so-called *teppō* were deployed at Akana Castle in Izumo Province by the Amako family, so these must have been the Chinese handguns (Suzuki 2000: 40 & 63). I believe that Yoshikiyo's *teppō* were also of this earlier type and that we can go even further and identify them as three-barrelled handguns identical to the variety most commonly deployed on the Ryūkyū Islands. The proof lies in the *Kōyō Gunkan* description of how they were to be used, because Yoshikiyo gives each man three bullets. He orders them to fire and then not to reload but to discard the weapons for hand-to-hand fighting. This can only make sense if the handguns are three-barrelled, so the *Kōyō Gunkan* story is probably the best recorded use of the weapons on the Japanese mainland. The reference to these strange handguns at Uedahara is therefore not to the first use of the new Portuguese firearms but to what may be the final use in battle of the old Chinese ones.

The matter could have been cleared up if the author of *Kōyō Gunkan* had gone on to describe the firearms in action, but unfortunately the account does not say how they were used because they are not mentioned again. Murakami Yoshikiyo concentrates instead on the ashigaru's appearance, how they wore distinguishing heraldic devices of a *sashimono* (back flag) and a *sode-jirushi* (small shoulder flag) each bearing the character '*ichi*' (the number 1) in black ink on a white background. As the battle of Uedahara began with a fierce charge by mounted samurai, neither the archers nor the mysterious handgunners may have managed to fire a single shot before the horsemen closed in on them.

The narrative in *Kōyō Gunkan* tallies with *Myōhōji ki* when it opens the battle with a classic mounted samurai advance led by Itagaki Nobukata of the Takeda force. As intended, his initial charge scattered the vanguard of the Murakami by its impact leaving the front ranks of ashigaru stunned and confused, but instead of cutting off the entire Murakami army at the



river it turned out that Itagaki Nobukata's fierce advance had only pierced the Murakami front line, leaving Nobukata's men vulnerable to a response. This could have been dealt with, but Nobukata paused to celebrate his achievement, a demonstration of over-confidence that was apparently one of his hallmarks. *Kōyō Gunkan* uses the phrase 'signs of carelessness' (Nakamura 1965: 48).

As noted earlier, Murakami Yoshikiyo had prepared for a Takeda cavalry assault and, if *Kōyō Gunkan* is to be believed, he had done it to such an extent that Itagaki Nobukata was a marked man at Uedahara. His personal contingent of bodyguards and servants were outnumbered by the Murakami ashigaru who were delegated to cover him at a ratio of 12:1, because Murakami Yoshikiyo mentions specifically 200 ashigaru in this role, who must have caught Nobukata and his team within a frightening hedge of spears. The main *Kōyō Gunkan* account says that Itagaki was 'pulled down from his horse' (Nakamura 1965: 48), an action that implies involvement by ashigaru who were ready with their spears, very probably somewhere near the spot that is now Itagaki Nobukata's grave, a place deep within the area that would have been occupied by the Murakami. We may therefore safely envisage a mass of Murakami ashigaru spearmen, some of whom had spears with short side-blades, surrounding Nobukata and neutralizing his immediate supporting followers before unhorsing him. This again showed Nobukata's carelessness in allowing such an event to occur. His head was soon taken, an action (naturally enough) that is not credited to any lowly ashigaru but to a samurai: a man called Kamijō

The battle of Uedahara from *Ehon Shingen Ichidai ki*. The Takeda army advances from the left rear against the Murakami. Uedahara provided several instances of conflict between mounted samurai and ashigaru fighting on foot. It proved to be a very fierce battle with a large number of casualties.



4HUMATE
2019



Itagaki Nobukata is surrounded at the battle of Uedahara

One of the most dramatic instances of fighting between an individual mounted samurai and ashigaru took place during the initial phase of the battle of Uedahara. Itagaki Nobukata, one of Takeda Shingen's 'Twenty-Four Generals', led a characteristically impetuous charge against the Murakami front line and broke through with ease. He then paused to reflect upon his achievement, at which point the Murakami counter-attacked. Here we see Nobukata separated from all his personal attendants apart from his standard bearer and being assaulted by a mass of enemy ashigaru. He is fighting back manfully, knocking his assailants to one side and impaling them upon his *mochi-yari* (spear) with such force that they are thrown into the air. Nobukata is shown wearing the suit of armour depicted in his portrait which hangs in the Shingen-ko Museum in Enzan. The armour is of somewhat old-fashioned design, a likely choice for a very superior samurai who despised the ashigaru rabble. It is laced in *kebiki-odoshi* (closely spaced cords), a style that was being rapidly abandoned because it offered so many places for an ashigaru's spearhead to make contact. Nobukata is fighting back, wielding his spear to good effect.

His standard bearer tries desperately to stay on his feet as he holds the crescent-moon banner high as a rallying point for other Takeda samurai to come to the aid of his master. He is of samurai rank and bears the Takeda *mon* (badge) as a *maedate* (helmet crest).

As clouds of arrows fly through the air towards approaching Takeda horsemen other Murakami ashigaru attack the now isolated Itagaki Nobukata. Their simple *okegawa-dō* body armour and *jingasa* (war hats) bear the character '*kami*' in the family name of Murakami. Those who belong to the specially selected force of spearmen wear an additional form of identification of a *sashimono* (back flag) and *sode-jirushi* (shoulder flag) bearing the character '*ichi*' (the number 1). The spearmen are all armed with long-shafted pike-like *nagae-yari* with which they are trying to dismount Nobukata. The ashigaru on the extreme left is holding a triple-barrelled Chinese-style handgun from which he has just discharged its three shots in one of the last such actions to be seen in Japanese history. He will now abandon the weapon and join in the assault on Nobukata with his sword as ordered by Murakami Yoshikiyo.

Oribe. At this a 'great shout' went up from the Itagaki ranks (Nakamura 1965: 54–55). In language characteristic of the genre, the *Kōyō Gunkan* notes that Murakami Yoshikiyo 'shed tears' at the loss of so noble a samurai leader, a gesture that was followed by Uesugi Kenshin when he was told the account (Nakamura 1965: 54).

Murakami Yoshikiyo then pressed on to confront Takeda Shingen's main body. 'One section of 600 men fought against Takeda Harunobu's *hatamoto* and drove them back two or three *chō* [200–300m] clashing swords with one man who looked like a general'; this unnamed samurai was unhorsed, but instead of committing honourable suicide 'as might be expected', notes Yoshikiyo, he fled (Nakamura 1965: 54). Amari Torayasu (1498–1548), another of the Takeda 'Twenty-Four Generals', was killed in action along with Zaima Kawachi-no-Kami and Hajikano Den'emon, the latter of whom is described as having been caught in a hail of arrows, another classic ashigaru weapon-squad tactic. Much more seriously, Takeda Shingen himself was also fully involved in the hand-to-hand spear fighting, 'attacking like flames from astride his horse' (Nakamura 1965: 55), and was wounded in his left arm as both sets of *hatamoto* fought hand to hand – evidence of how close the fighting was – leaving dead 145 mounted samurai of the Murakami and 450 of their ashigaru just in this phase of the action. On the Murakami side Yashiro Mototsuna, Kojima Ryōhei and Amemiya Gyōbu were the named senior casualties. In all there were 1,200 Takeda killed and 1,700 dead among the Murakami so that the waters of the Chikumagawa flowed red (Nakamura 1965: 47).



The two sides eventually disengaged, but instead of acknowledging his defeat Takeda Shingen is recorded as having stayed on the battlefield in a fortified camp for 20 days before withdrawing to Kōfu via Uehara Castle. This would appear to have been simply a political gesture by Shingen, who believed that the last to leave a battlefield must be regarded as the winner. This act of stubborn defiance drew no further response from Murakami Yoshikiyo, who had by now returned contemptuously to the safety of his castles. Shingen's untroubled withdrawal in style many days later allowed *Kōyō Gunkan* to record Uedahara as a victory when 'fortune favoured Lord Shingen' (Nakamura 1965: 50), and a remarkably precise figure of 2,919 enemy heads taken is included. *Myōhōji ki* agrees, but records that there was dissension among the lower classes of Kai Province because the wars were going on for such a long time.

There is an amusing modern anecdote concerning the battle. Itagaki Nobukata is buried on the battlefield and among the offerings made to his shrine are cigarettes and tobacco. For some unknown reason Nobukata is believed by today's worshippers to have been a habitual smoker, hence the offerings. As tobacco was introduced to Japan by the Portuguese at about the same time as matchlock muskets, it is interesting to note a modern folk belief which would depend on the habit of smoking having travelled across Japan faster than the use of matchlock muskets!

A haughty and confident Takeda Shingen watches the Murakami depart from the battlefield of Uedahara in a spread from *Ehon Shingen Ichidai ki*. Believing that whoever left the battlefield last was the winner, Shingen stayed in a fortified camp for 20 days and then claimed victory, even though it was the first defeat of his career and had resulted in the loss of Itagaki Nobukata, one of his finest generals.

Mikata ga Hara

25–26 January 1573

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

During the 25 years that passed between Uedahara and Mikata ga Hara, Takeda Shingen went from strength to strength. The mounted samurai of the Takeda distinguished themselves in several other encounters including the bloody fourth battle of Kawanakajima in 1561, and in 1573 Shingen gained a major victory at Mikata ga Hara, a battle that should never have happened. It was the unexpected bonus to a brilliant operation planned and executed by Shingen at the height of his powers and (unknown to him) the end of his career. Known as the Saijō Sakusen – ‘the campaign to take Kyoto from the east’ – it had the capital of Japan as its ultimate objective, although there is no evidence that in 1572 Shingen planned to go all the way to Kyoto. Nevertheless, any gains made along the Tōkaidō, the ‘Eastern Sea Road’ that led to Kyoto, would greatly facilitate such a scheme when it was eventually put into action. Sadly for the Takeda, no further moves would be made personally by their great leader because Shingen was to die just as the Saijō Campaign concluded, leaving his son Katsuyori to return to the fray two years later in 1574.

The seizure of Kyoto would have allowed the Takeda family to take control of the Shogun and achieve the reunification of Japan under their own rule but, needless to say, Takeda Shingen was not the only daimyo to cherish similar grandiose ambitions. Others were much better placed simply by geography alone to take over the Shogunate for themselves or at the very least to control the current holder of the post, which was still an institution that commanded unusual respect in spite of its military ineffectiveness. There are references throughout their history to Shoguns fleeing, being replaced, exiled or even assassinated, yet the honours and titles that could only be bestowed



by a Shogun were still highly valued and often fought over. For example, in 1559 the incumbent Shogun would give the post of *shugo* (Shogun's deputy) of Owari Province to a minor local daimyo called Oda Nobunaga. The title meant little in military terms to Nobunaga; its value lay instead in giving Nobunaga official approval for the complete takeover of his home province that he would accomplish during that year.

Oda Nobunaga (1534–82) plays an important role in the story of Mikata ga Hara. As well as being highly skilled in military matters he cherished ambitious ideas of taking over the Shogunate for himself, although for many years he lacked the military and political resources to make any such move. All that changed in 1560 when he defeated an invasion of his home province by Imagawa Yoshimoto (1519–60), who controlled the provinces of Mikawa, Tōtōmi and Suruga. Ota Gyūichi, the author of *Shinchō-Kō ki*, Nobunaga's biography written in 1610, may be exaggerating somewhat when he states that Yoshimoto marched west with an army of 45,000 men ready to brush to one side Nobunaga's paltry force of 2,000 men, but the discrepancy was certainly a considerable one (Kuwata 1965: 54). After easily taking a few border forts Yoshimoto rested his army in a gorge called Okehazama while he performed the traditional ceremony of viewing the severed heads of the defeated. Nobunaga then launched a surprise attack. The death of Yoshimoto set in motion the rapid collapse of Imagawa influence and the consequent rise to power of Nobunaga, who marched on Kyoto in 1568 and set up his own nominee Ashikaga Yoshiaki (1537–97) as the fifteenth and (as it turned out) last Ashikaga Shogun, while the furious Takeda Shingen could only watch from his distant mountains.

Nobunaga's takeover of the Ashikaga Shogunate provides the background to Shingen's 1572–73 Saijō Campaign, when he moved against several key

The now reconstructed castle of Takane, which was the first prize for Takeda Shingen in the Saijō Campaign of 1572.

fortresses held by Nobunaga and his ally Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), a man who will also play a crucial role in this story. Ieyasu protected Nobunaga's eastern flank in Mikawa and Tōtōmi provinces, so the Saijō Campaign was a mighty showdown between the old power of the Takeda and the new Tokugawa/Oda alliance, which it tested almost to destruction. Overall, the cooperation between Nobunaga and Ieyasu would prove to be one of the best examples of a loyal partnership in the whole of Sengoku Period Japan and lasted successfully until the moment of Nobunaga's death in 1582. Throughout that period Ieyasu, who never entered into formal vassalage under Nobunaga, normally took direct orders as the lesser partner in the coalition and only once acted as commander-in-chief of their combined forces. That unfortunate instance happened on the plain of Mikata ga Hara in 1573 and was almost a total disaster because Ieyasu disobeyed Nobunaga's explicit instructions not to engage in battle. An unplanned clash that then took place would provide an excellent example of a conflict involving mounted samurai against ashigaru, for which the confused and unexpected conditions proved ideal.

Takeda Shingen's Saijō Campaign had become possible because the long-standing pattern of alliances and suspicion which had swirled around Kai Province had recently shifted from one of an almost traditional cooperation between the Uesugi and the neighbouring Hōjō against the Takeda to one of a new Takeda/Hōjō alliance. This new situation allowed Shingen to confront both Nobunaga and Ieyasu directly without any fear of danger at his rear, so he risked the campaign of a lifetime with an army that totalled 25,000 in all including 2,000 troops supplied by Hōjō Ujimasa (1538–90) as part of their new alliance. As no precise records of the composition of the army exist an estimate has to be made using figures from *Kōyō Gunkan* of about the same time. The total of *ki* in the Takeda army is 9,121, but as a *ki* included both the mounted individual samurai and his attendants the number of actual fighting horsemen was probably around 3,000, including those in the *hatamoto*. As for the ashigaru who served outside the *hatamoto* and were therefore presumably in the weapon squads, a precise number of 5,489 is given but there is no breakdown according to weaponry. If we use a similar proportion to the figures for Uesugi Kenshin in 1575 noted earlier, which was roughly 1,000 archers and 3,500 spearmen to 300 musketeers, there may have been about 500–600 musketeers in Shingen's army, so it was well-balanced in terms of the old power of the Takeda horsemen and the new potential of ashigaru. It is known that as early as 1555 Shingen had sent 300 matchlock muskets to help in the defence of Asahiya Castle, so an estimate of 1,200 archers, 3,700 spearmen and 600 musketeers is perhaps not unreasonable for such an important campaign (Nakamura 1965: 305–29). Shingen was also under no doubt about the effectiveness of musket fire against horsemen, because there is an account in *Minowa Gunki* of their use in the siege of Minowa Castle in 1566: 'While over one hundred expert musketeers were firing from inside the castle about sixty horsemen attacked it, but the *teppō* ashigaru kept on firing and produced over 600–700 wounded and dead' (Sasama 1969: 64).

In 1572 Takeda Shingen was 52 years old and still projected his resolute image of the god Fudō despite having suffered from what is believed to have been pulmonary tuberculosis the previous year. Shingen was now master of



This statue of Takeda Shingen stands outside Kōfu Railway Station. The battle of Mikataga Hara was one of his most convincing victories but in truth it should never have happened at all.

Shinano Province and had also taken a firm hold on a short section of the Pacific Coast by his capture of Suruga Province. That meant Tokugawa Ieyasu was now his immediate neighbour to the west in Hamamatsu Castle in Tōtōmi Province. The Tōkaidō Road ran through Suruga Province into Tōtōmi Province, an area which both the Takeda and the Tokugawa had fortified heavily, particularly in the environs of the provincial border. This made an advance by the Takeda against Ieyasu along the Tōkaidō Road an unlikely proposition, as was to prove to be the case when Shingen launched the Saijō Campaign, because he planned to attack Nobunaga and Ieyasu from the north-east in a three-pronged coordinated advance as shown on the map on page 7.

Takeda Shingen's initial moves cannot have attracted much suspicion because the geography of Kai and Shinano provinces required that he first head north from Kōfu towards Lake Suwa. The section that would move against Nobunaga's Mino Province would then swing round further north along the Nakasendō, the central mountain road that was an inland alternative to the Tōkaidō Road. The moves against Ieyasu also began in the region of Lake Suwa and headed down the Iida Valley along the general course of the long Tenryūgawa (Tenryū River), which enters the Pacific Ocean to the east of Hamamatsu.

The first move out of Kai Province was made by Shingen's vanguard under Yamagata Masakage, and Shingen's great confidence is shown by the fact

This is one of the best illustrations in *Ehon Taikō ki* to depict combat between samurai and ashigaru. The young Maeda Toshiie is shown using his spear to very good effect from horseback. He is already victorious, as shown by the two heads hanging from his saddle. Now he despatches no fewer than five more ashigaru who are knocked flying. Similar scenes must have occurred at the battle of Mikata ga Hara.



that his vanguard travelled by a totally separate route from the main body. Yamagata Masakage and the vanguard left Kōfu on the 29th day of the 9th lunar month of the Third Year of Genki 3 (2 November 1572), heading for eastern Mikawa. They were followed by the Takeda main body under Shingen on 10m 3d (8 November). To set off so late in the year may appear surprising, but Shingen was counting on moving on solid ground through the mountains while snowfalls to the north prevented Uesugi Kenshin from intervening. From Lake Suwa the main body headed straight for Tōtōmi Province along the general line of the Tenryūgawa. Meanwhile Akiyama Nobutomo, one of the ‘Twenty-Four Generals’, led 3,000 men in a separate advance against Nobunaga’s Mino Province via the Nakasendō. Akiyama Nobutomo’s army laid siege to the vital border fortress of Iwamura, an action which would continue for most of the Saijō Campaign until Toyama Kageō, lord of Iwamura Castle, died of a sudden illness. The morale of the defending troops soon collapsed, so Toyama Kageō’s widow (an aunt of Oda Nobunaga) entered into negotiations with Akiyama Nobutomo. In mid-December they agreed terms whereby the castle would be surrendered without bloodshed if Lady Toyama agreed to marry Nobutomo, an unusual but successful peace deal.

On 10m 10d (15 November) Shingen’s main body crossed the border between Shinano and Tōtōmi provinces over the Aokuzure Pass. The first Tokugawa outpost to fall was the castle of Takane that stood high above the Misakubogawa (Misakubo River), after which the Takeda forces occupied Inui Castle. Here the Takeda main body divided in two to approach Futamata Castle, Tokugawa Ieyasu’s most important possession along the Tenryūgawa and the nearest major fortress to Hamamatsu. Needless to say, Ieyasu had been monitoring Shingen’s movements closely. A scouting force sent out under Honda Tadakatsu encountered one of these two Takeda armies at Hitokotosaka and only managed to escape because of the adroit manner in which Honda Tadakatsu organized their withdrawal. Meanwhile, Yamagata Masakage’s vanguard completed their march and joined Shingen at Futamata.



Futamata Castle was built on the edge of a cliff over the Tenryūgawa. A long siege of many weeks began under Shingen's son Takeda Katsuyori, but after many fruitless attacks he observed that the garrison depended upon a water supply obtained from the river by lowering buckets from a rather elaborate wooden water tower. Katsuyori conceived a plan of floating heavy wooden rafts down the river to smash against the water tower's supports. The tower eventually collapsed and the garrison finally surrendered on 12m 19d (22 January 1573). The Takeda army left Futamata shortly afterwards, but Shingen did not then head south to attack Hamamatsu. His objectives lay to the west across the nearby border with Mikawa Province. Shingen's strategy towards Hamamatsu was to ignore Ieyasu because the latter lacked the resources with which he could threaten the mighty Takeda army as it progressed.

Oda Nobunaga had sent reinforcements to Hamamatsu as soon as he heard about the attack on Futamata. Their leaders are named in *Shinchō-Kō ki* as Sakuma Nobumori, Hirate Jinzaemon Hirohide and Mizuno Shimotsukeno-Kami (Kuwata 1965: 129). Nobunaga could not have known his enemy's precise objectives, but Shingen certainly appeared to be cutting a swathe through Tōtōmi and Mikawa provinces to coincide with the ongoing operation at Iwamura in Mino Province. Faced by these moves Nobunaga's strategy was to monitor the Takeda army's progress until they could be safely challenged on ground of his own choosing. Hamamatsu was clearly not the place to do so, so Nobunaga sent strict orders to Ieyasu to stay securely within the castle and await orders to move out and attack Takeda Shingen's rear when the time was opportune.

It was at that point that Ieyasu decided to disobey orders, and all the accounts of the subsequent events suggest that samurai honour was the sole motivation for him making a suicidal advance out of Hamamatsu Castle against the mighty army that had insulted Tokugawa pride by devastating his province. Revenge was not a dish that could be served cold. Ieyasu's decision to attack must have taken Shingen by surprise, although the latter had the luxury of being able to swing his army round to the north and make a tight loop to take up positions on the plateau of Mikata ga Hara where the battle would shortly be fought.

Elements of the Tokugawa army are shown here in action at the battle of Mikata ga Hara. They had already managed a successful withdrawal after being surprised by Takeda Shingen's advance and the loss of Futamata Castle. Tokugawa Ieyasu marched his army out for a pitched battle that proved to be a near-disaster.

Mikata ga Hara, 25–26 January 1573

MAP KEY

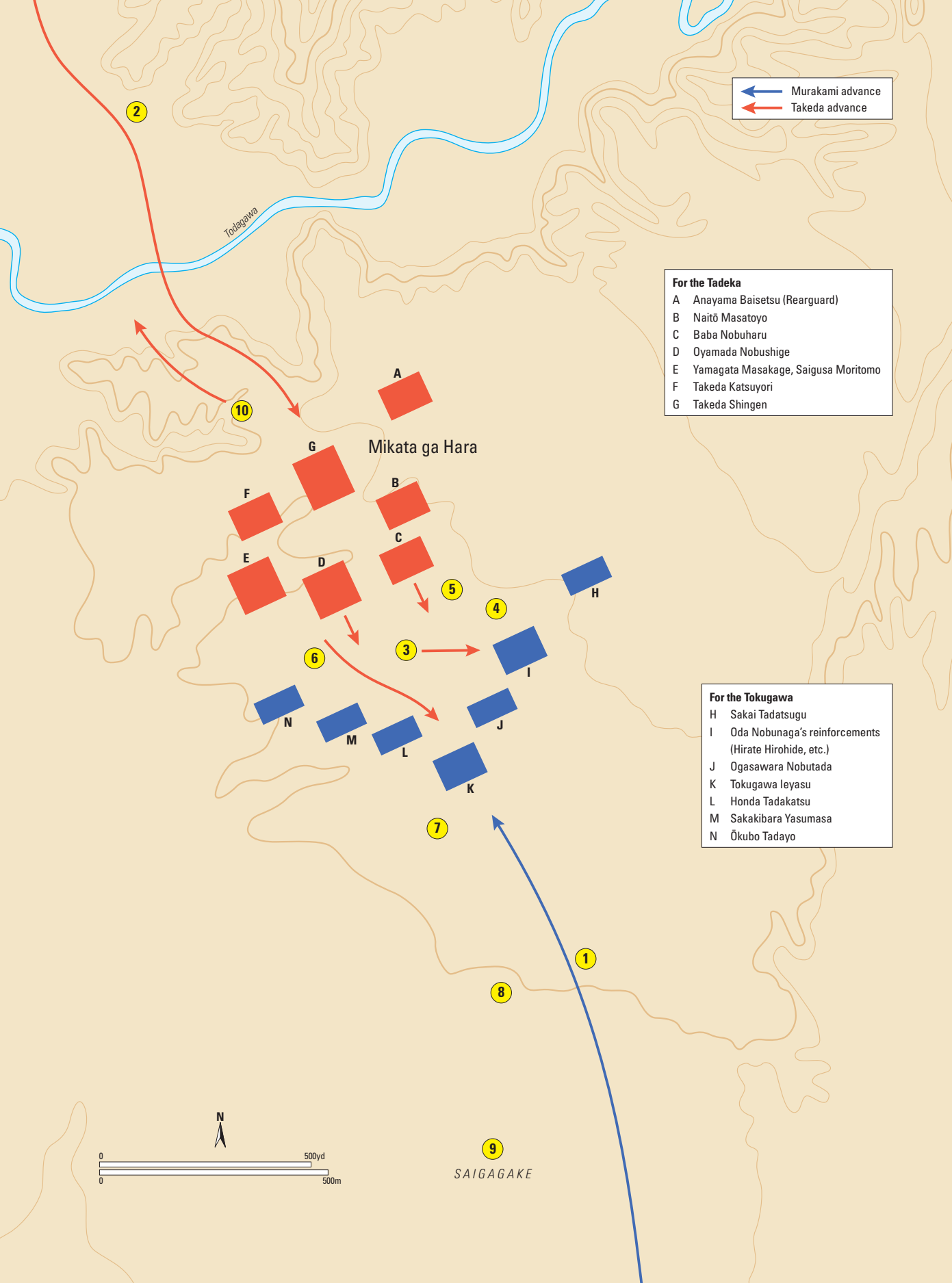
- 1 Morning, 25 January:** Tokugawa Ieyasu advances north from Hamamatsu and takes up position.
- 2 Morning, 25 January:** Takeda Shingen advances from Futamata three days after it falls and wheels his army round when he learns of Ieyasu's movements.
- 3 Early afternoon, 25 January:** Shingen sends stone-throwers towards the Tokugawa lines.
- 4 Early afternoon, 25 January:** The Tokugawa musketeers respond, revealing their distance from the Takeda lines. A musket duel begins.
- 5 Mid-afternoon, 25 January:** The Takeda left-flank vanguard under Baba Nobuharu advances against Nobunaga's troops.
- 6 Mid-afternoon, 25 January:** A second-wave mounted attack by 50 horsemen and their supporters is led by Saigusa Moritomo.
- 7 Late afternoon, 25 January:** Shingen launches a third-wave attack that reaches Ieyasu's *hatamoto*. The Tokugawa retreat begins.
- 8 Early evening, 25 January:** Several samurai-versus-ashigaru encounters take place during the pursuit.
- 9 Night of 25/26 January:** Ieyasu raids the Takeda camp at Saigagake.
- 10 26 January:** Shingen holds a head-viewing ceremony and then withdraws to continue his campaign against Oda Nobunaga.

Battlefield environment

The initial troop disposition of the battle of Mikata ga Hara, which was contested during the afternoon and evening of 12m 22d (25 January 1573), is easier to envisage than many other similar encounters because *Mikawa Gofudo ki* states that each side took up a standard battle formation chosen from the *hachijin*, eight traditional Chinese battlefield formations associated with the second Tang Emperor Taizong (598–649). Shingen's formation was *gyorin* (*yu lin* – fish scales). This was a prudent decision on Shingen's part, because Taizong had originally recommended it as the formation to adopt if one's army was outnumbered. Shingen had numerical superiority, but *gyorin* allowed him to use the restricted area of the Mikata ga Hara plateau to its best advantage, keeping his army concentrated and ready for a decisive move outwards. Ieyasu's advancing army was heavily outnumbered by about three to one in a total army of 11,000, of which 8,000 were his own troops and 3,000 were reinforcements from Nobunaga. These he drew up in a *kakuyoku* (*he yi* – crane's wing). The choice showed Ieyasu's determination to defeat the Takeda in battle, because *kakuyoku* allowed the possibility of rapid conversion into an offensive movement to surround an attacking enemy. The vanguard would absorb the enemy advance using missile

weapons and skirmishing while the outstretched and reverse-curved 'wings' that gave the formation its name spread out to envelop the enemy (Kuwata & Utagawa 1976: 25). The 3,000 men sent by Nobunaga were placed on Ieyasu's right wing while Sakai Tadatsugu of the Tokugawa force held the extreme right flank beyond them.

Neither of the two Chinese formations can have been kept in order for long, because the impression is given that once the fighting started there was huge confusion. This was partly due to the immediate battlefield environment. Mikata ga Hara was a flat and slightly elevated plateau that provided ideal conditions for bold mounted warfare, even though the Takeda samurai would be fighting with a river at their backs, but because of the time it took to dress their ranks no advance was made by either side until the afternoon. There were then only a few hours of fighting in a dull light of an overcast sky before darkness set in. The other contributing factor was the weather. Snow was looming and would fall before the battle was over, and to add to the visibility problem there seems to have been fog across the battlefield. By the time the Tokugawa army retreated to Hamamatsu Castle it was snowing and was so dark that they had to be guided back by burning torches and the beating of a drum.



INTO COMBAT

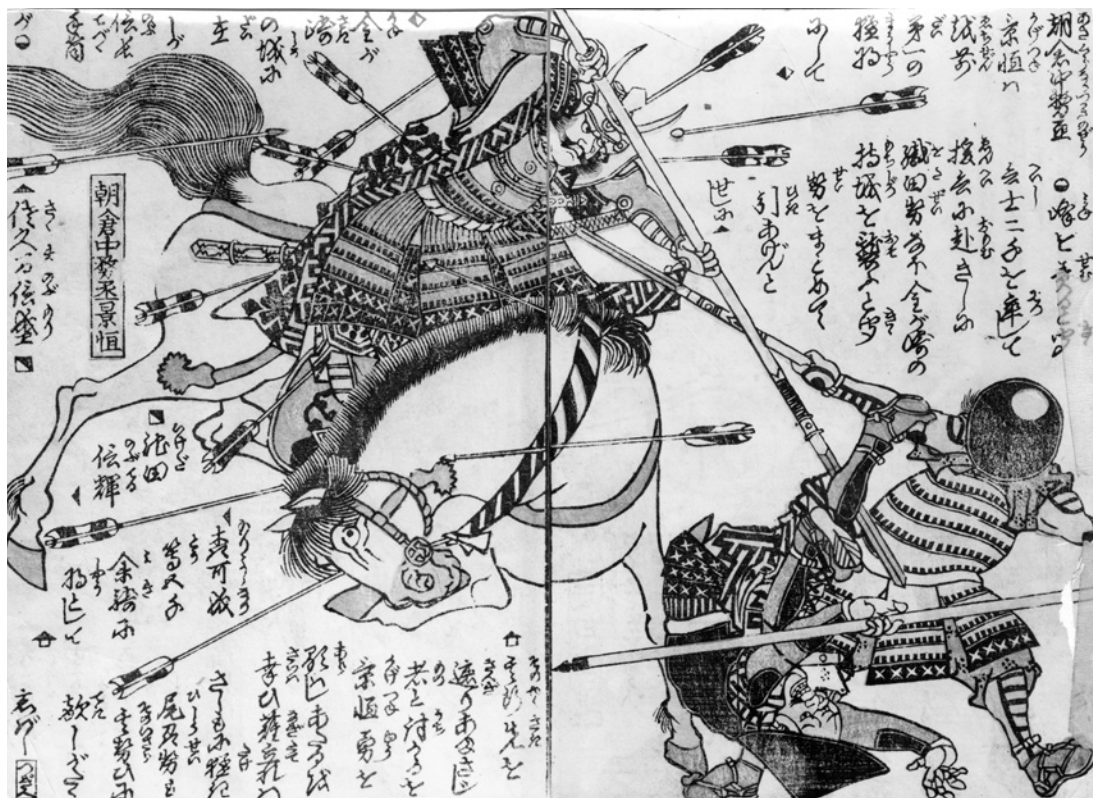
According to *Shinchō-Kō ki* the first shots of the battle of Mikata ga Hara were fired by Takeda Shingen's ashigaru, although they were 'shots' of a somewhat unusual kind. The account reads: '... ashigaru made contact at Mikata ga Hara. Sakuma, Hirate and other captains hurried there with horsemen, the two sides drew up their ranks and battle was joined. Shingen placed 300 men called *suiko no mono* into his front line and ordered them to throw stones' (Kuwata 1965: 129).

The use of stones is confirmed by *Mikawa Gofudo ki*, which states that Shingen had under his command 200–300 *zōnin* ('lower class fellows') who are not even dignified by giving them the title of ashigaru. 'They threw stones at Hirate's unit' (Kuwata & Utagawa 1976: 25). The word translated as 'stones' is *tsubute*, used elsewhere for the stone projectiles fired from Chinese handguns as at Uedahara, but as both sides now used European-type matchlock muskets in weapon squads it is very unlikely that these early weapons are indicated here. My conclusion is that the *zōnin* were nothing more than men press-ganged into service from the territories Shingen had captured from Ieyasu, a status also suggested by the literal meaning of 'water duty' for the expression *suiko no mono*. They were sent very close to the Tokugawa front line at great personal risk and told to use slingshots or even just hand-thrown stones picked up from the ground to intimidate the enemy vanguard into disclosing their position.

Mikawa Gofudo ki describes their action simply as 'weird' (Kuwata & Utagawa 1976: 25), although some of the stones fell with sufficient force to require the samurai to lean forward so that the neck guards of their helmets protected their heads and faces, and one or two suffered minor flesh wounds. The Tokugawa may have been somewhat surprised by the development, but they responded obligingly with gunfire from the ashigaru *teppō-gumi*, who fired blindly into the snow and gloom. Their actions may have achieved little more than cutting down the 'forlorn hope' stone-throwers, although this could be what Shingen had intended, because the ashigaru firing disclosed the Tokugawa positions and their likely distance away. Shingen therefore ordered a response from his own musketeers (Owada 1989: 181–182).

Takeda Shingen then took a great risk, because his musket barrage was followed by a mounted charge into the gloom by the Takeda vanguard horsemen to the beat of their war drums. Visibility must still have been a problem, but Shingen may have regarded that as an extra factor with which to intimidate the Tokugawa. An early success was registered on the Takeda left flank under Baba Nobuharu, and it was in this area that the first allied casualties occurred with the death of Hirate Hirohide from Nobunaga's force. Details of the hand-to-hand fighting appear in both *Shinchō-Kō ki* and *Mikawa Gofudo ki*, although most of the descriptions are concerned with the overall movements of the armies rather than any fine details. This is not surprising because of the visibility problems. The fighting continued while it grew steadily dark and the situation was always highly uncertain.

As for specific details of fighting between samurai and ashigaru, we know that two named senior samurai from Ieyasu's and Nobunaga's contingent



were killed during the first encounter. *Shinchō-Kō ki* notes: 'Shingen's men charged ahead. In the initial encounter Hirate Jinzaemon, some vassals from the Hirate house and Ieyasu's retainer Naruse Tōzō were killed' (Kuwata 1965: 129). These initial successes suggest that Shingen believed that the Tokugawa missile troops were so disordered that the battle could become a cavalry rout, so at that point Shingen calmly withdrew his forward units to rest and sent in fresh troops. The leader of the second wave was Saigusa Moritomo, who led 50 horsemen and their supporters in another fierce mounted assault against the disorganized Tokugawa. It was now getting dark, and seeing the Tokugawa troops reeling Shingen ordered a general attack by his main body, committing all his resources except those within his own *hatamoto*. Whatever firing there must have been from the Tokugawa ashigaru did nothing to stop the mounted advance, and their third wave even reached Ieyasu's *hatamoto*. There must have been considerable involvement by ashigaru at this stage of the battle, because *Mikawa Gofudo ki* uses the expression 'a hot fire of arrows and bullets from the right' in its description of what the Tokugawa suffered (Kuwata & Utagawa 1976: 28). This 'hot fire' can only have come from Shingen's weapon squads which were moved up quickly behind the charging horsemen, and it had the effect of further disorganizing Ieyasu's mounted samurai, most of whom must have realized that a retreat was inevitable.

One Tokugawa samurai who clearly appreciated the situation was Natsume Yoshinobu, the commander of Hamamatsu Castle. He had ridden out from the fortress to persuade his lord to withdraw, suggesting

This very fine book illustration shows a mounted samurai taking on two ashigaru spearmen with his own spear. His elevated position from horseback has served him well, and both his assailants are in peril. He is also under fire from ashigaru archers, however, and several arrows have hit both him and his unfortunate horse. This sort of situation happened frequently during the battles of Uedahara and Mikata ga Hara.

that he – Natsume – would hold back the enemy while Ieyasu retreated. Ieyasu seemed unwilling. He was clearly in a mood to die fighting so, with the future of the Tokugawa at stake and using the authority granted to him solely by his age, Natsume tugged on Ieyasu's bridle to bring his horse around, and struck it on the rump with his spear shaft. He called out to Ieyasu's personal attendants to ride with him for the castle.

The Tokugawa were now in full retreat, a situation that provided the perfect conditions for a further phase of ashigaru attacks on mounted samurai, who were now isolated and highly vulnerable. Tokugawa Ieyasu was of course the prime target, so Natsume performed the greatest act of service to a daimyo that any samurai could contemplate. He noticed that the Takeda troops were gaining on Ieyasu's party so he became Ieyasu's *kagemusha* (literally 'shadow warrior') – his body double. Hoping to mislead the Takeda, Natsume turned back into the mêlée shouting 'I am Ieyasu!' and plunged into the fight to be killed.

Natsume Yoshinobu's self-sacrifice distracted the Takeda for only a short while, however, and soon other Takeda samurai and ashigaru attacked Ieyasu and his attendants as they made their way out of the mêlée. One anonymous ashigaru archer was about to loose an arrow at Ieyasu at such close quarters that Amano Yasukage, who went on to survive the action, kicked the bow out of the man's hands. Surprisingly, Ieyasu appears also to have been armed with a bow (probably handed to him by his bow carrier) because he is recorded as having put an arrow through one Takeda ashigaru who ran at him with a long spear (Kuwata & Utagawa 1976: 28).

After these narrow escapes Ieyasu left the plain of Mikata ga Hara behind him and arrived at Hamamatsu Castle. His men were for barring the gates, but Ieyasu ordered them to leave them open and light fires to guide the retreating Tokugawa home. Sakai Tadatsugu went up into the gate tower and banged the war drum loudly to act as a further marker in the gathering darkness. This confident display had the further advantage of puzzling the pursuing Takeda, who stopped in front of the open gates, suspecting a trap. Had an assault been made at that point then Hamamatsu Castle could well have fallen, but Shingen held back. The castle was, after all, not his primary objective, and he noted that all the dead Tokugawa men, both samurai and ashigaru, had died facing the enemy. Those killed during the advance lay on their faces; those killed during the retreat were on their backs, so no night-time assault was made on the castle. Instead, the Takeda made bivouacs for the night just to the north of the castle in an area called Saigagake.

It was time for the Tokugawa ashigaru to hit back. Ōkubo Tadayō and Amano Yasukage assembled a squad of about 120 volunteers from among their surviving ashigaru including perhaps 16 musketeers, although a later source says there were 100 *teppō*. They were operating over familiar ground, so were able to get quite close to the Takeda camp. They then began pouring in bullets and arrows, and caused panic among the Takeda, some of whom were driven out of their lines in the darkness. Ōkubo Tadayō and Amano Yasukage had chosen their direction of attack well, because at Saigagake the lower slopes of the Mikata ga Hara plateau are split by a narrow and deep canyon about 30m deep in places. The surprise attack kept up the fiction of a strongly

defended castle and was a further instance of how ashigaru could be used to harass a superior yet confused enemy. Scores of Takeda samurai and horses fell into this ravine, where the Tokugawa troops again fired on them and then cut them down as they lay helpless.

The following morning (12m 23d: 26 January), Takeda Shingen held a brief head-viewing ceremony before moving off. The head of Hirate Hirohide was sent to Nobunaga to show Shingen's disapproval of the latter's support for Ieyasu and to warn Nobunaga that, having defeated his ally Tokugawa Ieyasu, Shingen was on the move again and was heading for Mikawa Province. His army soon crossed the border for their next objective, Noda Castle, which the Takeda started besieging on Genki 4, 1m 11d (13 February 1573). Its commander held out for a month until lack of provisions made an honourable surrender likely. According to a lively local legend the garrison decided to dispose of their stocks of alcoholic drink in the most appropriate manner. One of their number contributed to the party by playing a tune on his flute. Takeda Shingen heard the sound and headed below the walls to listen more closely. He was recognized by a sharpshooting (and evidently still sober) ashigaru musketeer who put a bullet into him. An alternative version has Shingen succumb to illness during the siege, but whatever was the cause, he died during the subsequent retreat to Kai Province: the master of ashigaru organization felled by an ashigaru's bullet.



The mortal wounding of Takeda Shingen at the siege of Noda in 1573. Shingen is believed to have been hit by an ashigaru's bullet fired from the defended Noda Castle. He died on the way back to Kai Province. It was a sad end to a triumphant campaign from which the Takeda clan never really recovered.

Nagashino

28 June 1575

BACKGROUND TO BATTLE

In 1575 Takeda Shingen's heir, Takeda Katsuyori (1546–82), carried out an advance similar to his father's Saijō Campaign of 1572, but the 1575 operation bears no such grandiose title and will of course always be known as the Nagashino Campaign because of the battle by which it concluded, when Oda Nobunaga's ashigaru broke the charge of the legendary Takeda mounted samurai. Nobunaga's victory provides the most dramatic example in Japanese history of conflict between samurai and ashigaru. The deployment of musketeers and the strict control of their firing is the best-known factor of course, but Nobunaga's success depended most of all on good defensive tactics that took account of the terrain and the balance of manpower between the two sides.

Oda Nobunaga had shown an early appreciation of both spears and handguns, having received his first lessons in firearms technology at the age of 15. During a visit in 1553 to his father-in-law Saitō Dōsan, Nobunaga turned up at the head of an army carrying 800 spears and supposedly 500 *teppō*. This passage in *Shinchō-Kō ki* is regularly misquoted, however, because in Ōta Gyūichi's original text the 500 weapons cited consist of both firearms and bows, so Saitō Dōsan's positive impression of his ambitious son-in-law derived from Nobunaga's command of an army rather than any intimidating sight of long ranks of soldiers carrying innovative weapons (Kuwata 1965: 30).

The following year Nobunaga put his matchlock muskets into action during the short siege of Muraki Castle, and *Shinchō-Kō ki* tells us a revealing little anecdote about their use. Nobunaga's samurai had been vying with each other in crossing Muraki Castle's wide moat and scrambling up the castle

walls, but suffered many casualties from shots fired from the castle's loopholes. Three apertures in particular were providing the fiercest fire, so Nobunaga resolved to silence them personally. Stationing himself on the edge of the moat, Nobunaga kept up a constant fire against the loopholes by exchanging one pre-loaded firearm for another (Kuwata 1965: 38–39). Oda Nobunaga's single-handed action shows that he appreciated how important it was for matchlock muskets to maintain a constant fire if they were to overcome the problem of their loading times, a challenge he would tackle on a grander scale at Nagashino.

The man who would be the loser at the battle of Nagashino was Takeda Katsuyori, the son of the great Takeda Shingen. He took over the clan in 1573, even though the Takeda tried to keep Shingen's death secret and did not hold his funeral until 1576. It was an unenviable task to inherit the reputation of a father who had become a legend in his own lifetime. The old generals had considerable respect for Katsuyori as a soldier, but little else, largely because Katsuyori proved unwilling to listen to their recommendations, preferring to make major policy decisions without first undertaking any consultation.

Nevertheless, prior to the actual battle of Nagashino Katsuyori's operations may be compared honourably to his late father's campaigns, because under their new lord the Takeda had continued to score wins against the Oda and Tokugawa alliance in Mino, Tōtōmi and Mikawa provinces throughout 1574. In March of that year Katsuyori led an army into Mino Province and surrounded Akechi Castle. Nobunaga hastily dispatched a relief force under his eldest son Nobutada and his follower Ikeda Nobuteru, but they arrived too late because the castle's commander had already surrendered. Later that year, Katsuyori would gain another notable victory by taking Tokugawa Ieyasu's Takatenjin Castle in Tōtōmi Province, and once again Nobunaga despatched a relief force which arrived too late.

The year 1575 therefore found Takeda Katsuyori continuing the aggressive policy which Takeda Shingen had set in motion years earlier and in which Katsuyori had participated with considerable honour and success. At that stage the ghost of Shingen would have been immensely proud of his son, and his pride would have swelled even more when he learned that Katsuyori now planned to take Ieyasu's provincial capital of Okazaki, a hugely symbolic prize and a considerable challenge to Oda Nobunaga. Okazaki lay at some distance from Katsuyori's previous gains because it was situated in western Mikawa Province. There was therefore a greater degree of risk in the operation, although Katsuyori's acquisition of Akechi Castle in Mino Province would help to cover the approach.

The projected capture of Okazaki, which was commanded by Ieyasu's son Nobuyasu, was therefore fully in line with all that Shingen had planned and achieved in his own lifetime. The idea, however, met with opposition from Katsuyori's senior generals, although the overall goals of the campaign did not worry them. They urged caution because of the timing. It was very late in the campaigning season so farm labour was already required, and they were also still in arms against Uesugi Kenshin to the north. What encouraged Katsuyori to override the generals' cautious advice was the existence of a traitor in Okazaki called Oga

Yashirō, who had offered to open the gates of the castle to an advance by the Takeda army. The Mikawa operation might, therefore, best be regarded as a planned surgical strike to capture a prize that was lying there for the taking. When Oga's treachery was explained to them the generals dropped their opposition to the campaign, but there was still the factor of manpower requirements, which probably accounts for the fact that Katsuyori departed with only 15,000 men rather than the 25,000 Shingen had taken on the Saijō Campaign. The missing ashigaru would have been working in the fields or serving in the contingent under Kosaka Danjō that had set off for Echigo against Uesugi Kenshin.

Takeda Katsuyori's army departed from Kōfu by the now well-established route via Lake Suwa on Tenshō 3, 4m 21d (8 June 1575). They followed the course of the Tenryūgawa as far as Iida Castle and then headed south-west in the general direction of Okazaki, but while they were somewhere near the border between Mino and Mikawa provinces news was brought to Katsuyori that Oga's plot had been discovered. The traitor had been captured and sentenced to the slow death of the bamboo saw, whereby the felon was buried up to his neck in the ground with his head protruding through a wooden board. Beside the board was a bamboo saw, which passers-by were invited to take to his neck. Oga died in agony a few days later.

An attack upon Okazaki could no longer be considered by Katsuyori with his small force, so he swung the army eastwards, determined to cause some destruction to the Tokugawa before he returned home. At Noda, the scene of his father's mortal wound, Katsuyori began to head downstream along the Toyokawa (Toyo River) towards a worthy secondary objective: the castle of Yoshida (modern-day Toyohashi) on the Pacific Coast. Their attack began on 5m 6d (14 June). The keeper of Yoshida Castle was Sakai Tadatsugu, commander of the eastern Mikawa division of the Tokugawa army and one of Ieyasu's most reliable generals, but when Katsuyori arrived outside its walls he discovered that its 7,000-man garrison had been augmented by Tokugawa Ieyasu himself, who was inside Yoshida Castle with a further 5,000 troops. Ieyasu had heard of Katsuyori's advance and had been following his movements, so he had speedily reinforced the base that he had judged correctly to be the Takeda's secondary target. Yoshida Castle therefore contained a large number of troops; but the one factor that may have encouraged Katsuyori was that the situation was very similar to that which had existed just prior to Mikata ga Hara, because Ieyasu was inside a castle and a large Takeda army was outside it. Could Ieyasu be persuaded to march his army out for a pitched battle once again?

The initial moves in the siege of Yoshida Castle looked promising for the Takeda, because small contingents of the Tokugawa garrison did indeed sally forth to do battle with the Takeda vanguard outside the castle walls. The purpose of these actions would appear to have been little more than the achievement of personal samurai glory, however, because the combatants were not followed by any larger Tokugawa force and were summoned back into the castle once their honourable encounters had finished. This fighting outside the walls of Yoshida Castle nevertheless adds usefully to our knowledge of samurai fighting ashigaru. The spear-and-musket fighting was pursued with



great ferocity by both sides, and one senior Tokugawa samurai at least fell victim to a musket ball, so Katsuyori must have deployed his *teppō-gumi* against the individual seekers of glory. In one such attack against a musket squad, Mizuno Tadashige from the Tokugawa force had his right elbow shattered by a bullet but continued to wield his spear in single combat using his left arm (Futaki 1989: 32).

Takeda Katsuyori eventually realized that the 12,000 men inside Yoshida Castle were not going to oblige him with a battle outside its walls, and that there was little point in carrying out a long siege against such a strong garrison. Katsuyori therefore decided to abandon the secondary objective of the campaign and turned his army in a northerly direction back up the Toyokawa, where lay a very suitable tertiary objective: the tiny Nagashino Castle. This castle was held for the Tokugawa by a small garrison under one of Katsuyori's most hated enemies: Okudaira Sadamasa, who had shifted his allegiance from the Tokugawa to the Takeda and then back again. It would be a good consolation prize with which to conclude the otherwise uninspiring Mikawa Campaign. Katsuyori held council with the 'Twenty-Four Generals' and received from them a considerable difference of opinion over what to do about Nagashino Castle. Shingen's veterans were for making an honourable withdrawal to Kai Province. The younger generals were for carrying on the fighting, however, and it was the latter course of action that appeared most attractive to Katsuyori, no doubt because he reckoned that his honour was at stake.

Showing obvious signs of distress, members of Takeda Katsuyori's senior staff (the so-called 'Twenty-Four Generals') prepare to face the coming battle of Nagashino. The scene is a council of war held the night before the battle, 20 June 1575. Takeda Katsuyori is in the upper left-hand corner. The scroll is now held in the Nagashino Castle Preservation Hall.

Nagashino, 27–28 June 1575

MAP KEY

- 1 Evening, 27 June:** The Oda/Tokugawa army arrives. Takeda Katsuyori draws up his final plans.
- 2 0500hrs, 28 June:** Oda Nobunaga takes up position behind a fence.
- 3 0600hrs, 28 June:** The Takeda advance begins.
- 4 0800hrs, 28 June:** The attack on the Tobigasuyama forts begins. The Takeda vanguard conducts its first charge.
- 5 c.0900hrs, 28 June:** A second Takeda charge is followed by a third and then a fourth charge. At c.1000hrs, the mêlée begins.
- 6 1300hrs, 28 June:** The Takeda forces begin their withdrawal; Baba Nobuharu is killed.

Battlefield environment

The castle of Nagashino was situated on a bluff at the confluence of two rivers, both of which were deeper and faster-flowing than they are today. The Takeda siege lines included a number of forts on nearby mountains, which were raided at the same time that the battle of Nagashino began. The famous battle was fought somewhat to the west of the castle where Nobunaga arranged his lines as a temptation to the Takeda, to which Katsuyori responded by launching a series of charges against the Oda defences. A general mêlée then began which

lasted for several hours. The Takeda forces eventually retreated and were pursued, during which time several notable individual encounters took place.

The topography of the area meant that the action was confined to a narrow area of flat land between mountains and the river. The land was crossed by a narrow stream and the paddy fields are likely to have been in cultivation. There had been rain the night before, which Katsuyori hoped would cause problems for Nobunaga's musketeers.



The reconstructed fence at Shidarahara, the site of the battle of Nagashino. The photograph was taken at about the same time during the year that the battle took place. We are looking from the point of view of the attacking Takeda horsemen at about the distance from where the first bullets would have been fired by Oda Nobunaga's ashigaru.

Fence line

For the Tadeka

- A Baba Nobuharu
- B Sanada Nobutsuna
- C Tsuchiya Masatsugu
- D Takeda Nobutoyo
- E Takeda Katsuyori
- F Obata Nobusada
- G Takeda Nobukado
- H Natō Masatoyo
- I Hara Masatane
- J Yamagata Masakage

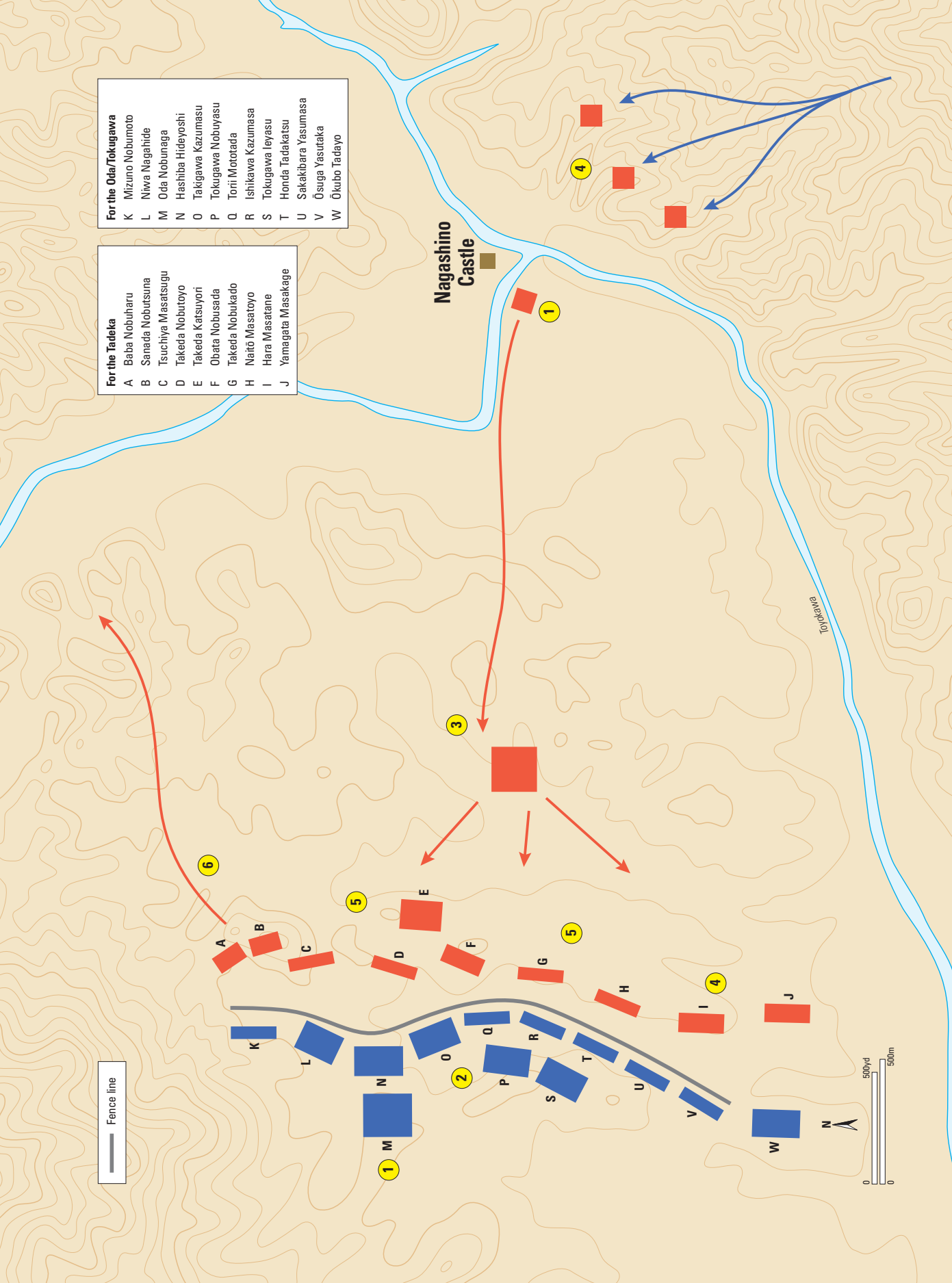
For the Oda/Tokugawa

- K Mizuno Nobumoto
- L Niwa Nagahide
- M Oda Nobunaga
- N Hashiba Hideyoshi
- O Takigawa Kazumasu
- P Tokugawa Nobuyasu
- Q Torii Mototada
- R Ishikawa Kazumasa
- S Tokugawa Ieyasu
- T Honda Tadakatsu
- U Sakakibara Yasumasa
- V Ōsuga Yasutaka
- W Ōkubo Tadayo

Nagashino Castle

Tokikawa

N



INTO COMBAT

Takeda Katsuyori began the assault on Nagashino Castle on 5m 11d (19 June). Over the next few days he appears to have tried everything to capture it: a waterborne attack from the rivers that flowed around it; tunnels from the land side, terrific assaults and night attacks. Nothing seemed to make any impression upon the castle, and Katsuyori knew that the longer he remained in his siege lines the more likely it was that Oda Nobunaga or Tokugawa Ieyasu would send a relieving army to the castle's aid. This was precisely what happened, because even though Nagashino was tightly sealed off from the outside world, one brave samurai from the garrison called Torii Sun'emon managed to slip out and contact Okazaki to urge immediate relief. Most heroically of all, Torii returned to the vicinity of the castle and lit a pre-arranged fire beacon to inform the garrison that help was on its way. When he attempted to swim the river back to Nagashino, however, he was captured, and was promised his life if he would send a false message to the besieged saying that no army was on its way and that surrender was inevitable. The Takeda clearly did not trust him because they bound him to a cross before letting him shout across the river. Torii told the defenders in a loud voice that Nobunaga was on his way to relieve them. Brave Torii was immediately put to death for his pains.

To the Takeda the situation at Nagashino was Mikata ga Hara in reverse. Oda Nobunaga arrived with 38,000 men and chose a position that was deliberately intended to entice the Takeda generals and their 15,000 men from within their secure siege lines. It was an uncomfortable comparison for the veterans of 1573, but soon even the old generals had to accept that Katsuyori was determined to meet Nobunaga in battle, so their attempts at persuasion changed from urging retreat to meeting Nobunaga on ground of their own choosing. Baba Nobuharu suggested that if there was to be a fight at all it should be conducted from within Nagashino Castle. The Takeda should therefore make a determined effort to take the fortress before the allied army arrived so that they could then face the Oda and Tokugawa from within its walls. This did not happen, and *Shinchō-Kō ki* comments that had Katsuyori even just occupied the high ground to the west as an alternative he would have been unassailable and the relieving army would have gone home (Kuwata 1965: 169). Instead he chose to meet Nobunaga in battle at Shidarahara – the ground of Nobunaga's own choosing. *Shinchō-Kō ki* describes this in detail, and the existence of the crucial fence is noted very precisely: 'The topography of Shidara [*sic*] was that of a large hollow into which Nobunaga carefully introduced his men in such a way that they would not be seen by the enemy. A palisade for repelling cavalry was erected in front of Ieyasu's and Takikawa's positions' (Kuwata 1965: 168–69).

Prior to the actual battle of Nagashino, Nobunaga arranged a little surprise for the Takeda in their siege lines similar to the raid delivered at Saigagake two years earlier. *Shinchō-Kō ki* puts Nobunaga's thoughts on the matter into very believable words:

'He has brought his troops so close that it must be a gift from heaven, and I shall kill them all,' thought Nobunaga. He considered how he could achieve this



without a single loss on his own side and made plans accordingly. He placed Sakai Saemonnojō in overall command of 2,000 skilled archers and musketeers from Ieyasu's army. He supplemented them with a unit of his own Horse Guards and 500 of his own musketeers, together with *metsuke* [observers]. (Kuwata 1965: 169)

Note how the raid is planned as a joint operation between ashigaru and Nobunaga's elite Horse Guards, evidence of the faith Nobunaga had in cooperation between arms. It also shows how confident he was of stopping the Takeda cavalry on the morrow at Shidarahara without the participation of these troops, even if their numbers seem somewhat exaggerated for what was only a raiding party. They left at midnight under the cover of a heavy rainstorm. Guided by local men, who were familiar with the territory even under conditions of darkness, the raiders covered the 8km distance safely. They swung widely out to the south, completely bypassing the Takeda lines, and approached the Tobigasuyama lines from the rear. At 0800hrs on 5m 13d (21 June), by which time the battle of Nagashino was already under way, this unit launched an attack on Takeda Nobuzane's lines on Tobigasuyama. The assault began with musket fire, followed by the loosing of fire arrows on to the temporary buildings, whose thatched roofs soon caught fire. Takeda Nobuzane was killed in the fierce hand-to-hand fighting that ensued. Soon smoke was seen rising from Tobigasuyama by the besiegers of Nagashino who were powerless to intervene, so all they could do was watch as one section of their army was annihilated. The chaos on Tobigasuyama had also been spotted by Okudaira Sadamasa and the garrison of Nagashino, and when Tobigasuyama went up in smoke Okudaira gave orders for the gate of Nagashino Castle to be opened, and he led a charge out and into the remaining besiegers.

The painted screen of the battle of Nagashino is a contemporary work in which stylized groups of figures convey the essence of the greatest encounter between samurai and ashigaru. In this section two separate units on the battlefield have been combined with artistic licence, so we see the Okubo brothers in charge with Honda Tadakatsu standing behind them. The musketeers are dressed more like samurai than ashigaru, but their armour is still of a simple nature as befits their lowly status. This is a modern copy of the original screen in Nakatsu Castle.

Yamagata Masakage

Few samurai match up to the notion of the ideal mounted warrior better than Yamagata Masakage (1529–75), who became one of the Takeda 'Twenty-Four Generals' and died from an ashigaru bullet at the battle of Nagashino. Masakage was a *samurai-taishō* (general of samurai) and was usually to be found in command of the vanguard of the Takeda army. Born in 1529, he was the son of Obu Dōetsu and the younger brother of Obu Toramasa. His first battle for the Takeda was an attack on Kannomine Castle during the Ina Valley Campaign of 1554. In 1557 he was sent into Shinano Province on a raiding mission in revenge for previous incursions by Uesugi Kenshin and captured Otari Castle. This led to the third battle of Kawanakajima (otherwise known as the battle of Uenohara) later in the same year, which was fought only between Shingen's vanguard under Masakage and Uesugi Kenshin's rearguard. In 1561 Masakage played an important part in the bloody fourth battle of Kawanakajima when his counter-attack against Uesugi Kenshin's vanguard helped save the day. Four years later Masakage had to deal with a family tragedy when his elder brother joined Takeda Yoshinobu in a rebellion against Shingen and was forced to commit suicide. Following his brother's death Masakage changed his family name to Yamagata and took over his brother's practice of dressing all his personal retainers in red armour, who 'exploded on the enemy like a ball of fire' according to *Kōyō Gunkan* (Nakamura 1965: 276), although it must be noted that other units in the Takeda army such as Obata Nobusada's also dressed in red. These *aka sonae* ('red regiments') were seen in action during the operations in Western Kōzuke and Suruga provinces, and in 1569 Masakage helped save the Takeda again at the battle of Mimasatoge (the pass of Mimasaka). The plan was for the Hōjō army to ambush the Takeda as they made their way home through the pass after a raid against Odawara. This was carried out, and looked like succeeding until Masakage launched a devastating flank attack on the Hōjō left wing. The main body of the Takeda then broke through and escaped to Kōfu.

Masakage's boldest assignment was to lead the Takeda vanguard on an entirely separate route from the main body during the Saijō Campaign of 1572. He was also present when Takeda Shingen was shot



Yamagata Masakage was one of the finest among Takeda Shingen's so-called 'Twenty-Four Generals'. He led the vanguard during the Saijō Campaign of 1572 that ended in the battle of Mikata ga Hara, and was killed at Nagashino. Here he is seated on a camp stool with his general's *saihai* (baton of command) in his hand. This portrait of him is in the Shingen-ko Museum in Enzan.

and mortally wounded at the siege of Noda Castle in 1573. According to legend, when Shingen's palanquin stopped during the withdrawal to Kōfu the dying Shingen called out to Masakage to plant his banner on the bridge of Seta, the vital river crossing that has always acted as the outer defence of Kyoto, Shingen's ultimate goal. The loyal Masakage went on to serve Takeda Katsuyori, who ignored every attempt by the veteran warrior to dissuade him from a series of rash and unwise actions. As the devoted servant of the Takeda Yamagata Masakage accepted the orders that Katsuyori gave, and this consummate leader of mounted samurai paid for it by dying a suitable death during the charge at Nagashino when he was hit by a volley of ashigaru bullets.

Meanwhile the showdown at Shidarahara that history knows as the battle of Nagashino had already begun. The two armies were initially separated by 20 *chō* (2.18km), and the Oda army was drawn up behind the protection provided by a series of loose wooden fences augmented by large wooden

Toyotomi Hideyoshi

The ashigaru who served Japan's daimyo led a life that was divided between farming and fighting. With no family name and usually no land of their own, they fought and died almost anonymously, so little is known about any individual ashigaru. The battle of Nagashino, however, provides an example of one man at least who had had the experience of ashigaru life and had earned samurai status because of his conduct on the battlefield. This was Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the future unifier of Japan then known as Hashiba Hideyoshi, who was one of Oda Nobunaga's unit commanders. The *shiba* character in his family name was taken from the name of Shibata Katsuie, a general of Nobunaga whom Hideyoshi greatly admired, and the granting of a family name by Nobunaga in 1567 was an immense privilege that demonstrated how Hideyoshi had 'arrived' in the samurai class.

The future Hideyoshi had been born in very humble circumstances in the village of Nakamura (within modern Nagoya City) to a man who farmed land in this area of the Oda's Owari Province. His father Yaemon served when occasion demanded as an ashigaru in the army of Oda Nobunaga (Nobunaga's father), until an injury excluded Yaemon permanently from military service. There are no firm details about Yaemon's precise role, but he died in 1543 leaving a daughter and the

seven-year-old Hideyoshi. His widow later remarried. In a popular tale of Hideyoshi's childhood we read of his being sent to a temple to be a monk but absconding to join Oda Nobunaga's army. He certainly served Nobunaga as an ashigaru and acted as a sandal bearer, a role equivalent to that of a batman. Hideyoshi would therefore have been found standing near Nobunaga as one of his personal attendants on the battlefield, and another popular story has him endearing himself to Nobunaga by his practice of warming his master's sandals inside his own shirt. At this time he assumed the family name of Kinoshita, but by 1567 Nobunaga gave him an official one – Hashima – following his conduct at the siege of Inabayama. By now Hideyoshi was a samurai, and he continued to serve at the battle of Anegawa in 1570, following which he received extensive grants of land. At Nagashino we see him at the height of his powers under Nobunaga.

Following Nobunaga's death in 1582 Hideyoshi carried out a coup, and after a series of massive military campaigns unified Japan in 1591. He then set in motion a series of measures that would eventually separate the samurai from the land, distinguishing the fighting samurai from the cultivating farmers, and ensuring along the way that no one else would follow in his footsteps from ashigaru to samurai.



This print by Yoshitoshi Tsukioka (1839–92) shows a mounted samurai using his two-handed sword to defend himself against the young Toyotomi Hideyoshi who is on foot and using a spear to bring him down. Hideyoshi is shown without a helmet to indicate his then lowly status as an ashigaru.

shields in which were left gaps to allow a counter-attack. *Shinchō-Kō ki* relates: 'The position at the front was the privilege accorded to a local warrior, and was therefore allotted to Ieyasu' (Kuwata 1965: 168–69). Unfortunately, the historical sources are in conflict over the number of firearms deployed behind

the fence. *Mikawa Go Fudo-ki* says 3,000, but the earlier *Shinchō-Kō ki* notes only 1,000, which is a considerable discrepancy. The larger figure was well within Nobunaga's resources, but Nobunaga's enduring reputation depends on the use he made of his matchlock muskets, not the numbers of them he possessed. Indeed, his biographer Ōta Gyūichi had been surprised by the large number of firearms supplied to Nobunaga in 1570 by allies from the Negoroji temple, which greatly exceeded the number deployed by his master and 'made the heavens shake with their sound' (Kuwata 1965: 110).

Even though it uses the smaller number *Shinchō-Kō ki* portrays gunfire as the decisive element in the epic struggle, where the ashigaru musketeers were under the command of five *bugyō* ('commissioners', equivalent to the Takeda's *ashigaru-taishō*) named by *Shinchō-Kō ki* as Sassa Narimasa, Maeda Toshiie, Nonomura Masanari, Fukuzumi Heizaemon and Ban Kurōzaemon. The musketeers were protected as they reloaded by the ashigaru spearmen, whose contribution to the victory should not be underestimated; it is also more than likely that the musket fire would have been considerably augmented by the ashigaru *yumi-gumi*, who could put more arrows into the air compared to the number of bullets fired. To add to the defence provided by the palisade and the spears, a smoke screen must also have been expected to be produced by 1,000 matchlock muskets firing every few minutes.

Confident that the shock of the famous Takeda charge would sweep Oda Nobunaga's army to one side regardless of any casualties from bullets, Takeda Katsuyori ordered an advance along the line. The right wing of the Takeda was under the overall command of Anayama Nobukimi, and Baba Nobuharu led its vanguard with 120 mounted samurai. The brothers Sanada Nobutsuna and Sanada Masateru followed, while Tsuchiya Masatsugu and Ichijō Nobutatsu completed the assault. The centre companies were composed of about 3,000 men under the overall command of Takeda Nobukado, Katsuyori's cousin. Their vanguard was led by Naitō Masatoyo. Within the centre company was the largest single contingent of horsemen in the Takeda army: a 500-strong unit under Obata Nobusada. The left wing was composed of a further 3,000 men under the overall command of Takeda Nobutoyo, another cousin of Katsuyori's. Takeda Nobutoyo was the son of Takeda Nobushige, who had been killed at Kawanakajima in 1561. The vanguard of the left wing was in the most experienced hands of all, those of Yamagata Masakage, whose contingent attacked first.

These movements would be captured forever on the contemporary painted screen of the battle of Nagashino owned by the Tokugawa Art Museum in Nagoya. It is a highly stylized depiction because a few figures are used to represent what must have been large-scale and highly confusing encounters, but its major theme is the conflict between ashigaru musketeers and mounted samurai, who perish in a very dramatic fashion. Groups of musketeers discharge their weapons simultaneously under the watchful eyes of dismounted Oda and Tokugawa samurai, while the Takeda horses are shown falling dead and throwing their riders in classic images of a broken cavalry charge. *Shinchō-Kō ki* describes how the five waves of mounted attacks actually worked out, naming the Takeda generals who were met by the gunfire: 'Nobunaga gave orders for his ashigaru to take up forward positions



close to the enemy lines and watched them as they did so. The first wave of the attack was led by Yamagata Masakage. To the beat of their war drums the Takeda men came charging. Blasted by ferocious gunfire they pulled back ...' (Kuwata 1965: 170).

The more elaborate and romantic *Mikawa Go Fudoki* also describes Yamagata Masakage's advance against the right wing of the Oda army. The Oda commanders there were Ōkubo Tadayo and Ōkubo Tadasuke, who had fought the Takeda before at the battle of Mikata ga Hara and were under no illusions as to the task which was required of them (Kuwata & Uwagata 1976: 70–78). Their troops were not protected by a fence so Yamagata Masakage must have thought his opponents would be a pushover, and the clash is well illustrated on the Nagashino screen. Unhindered by any palisades, and with a wider ground over which to operate than their comrades along the line, the troops of the Takeda vanguard took casualties from the bullets and crashed into the Ōkubo body of troops. Here a fierce hand-to-hand fight developed, the first *mêlée* of the day.

Looking at the situation from the point of view of the horsemen who charged the palisades, it would be wrong to think of a cavalryman literally charging headlong into a fence, even if that fence was not blazing with gunfire. Under normal circumstances the horsemen relied on the infantry breaking as the cavalry approached, so that the foot soldiers could be cut down at will, just as had happened at Mikata ga Hara. A typical horseman at Nagashino might be expected to stop in front of the palisade to wield his spear to the best advantage against the defenders, who may well have loosed off one shot but should now be running in terror. As it turned out the actual scenario –

ABOVE LEFT

Two of the Takeda contingents (the Yamagata and Obata units) at Nagashino had samurai who dressed all in red. The colour would have resembled the face mask on this specimen of red armour in Kawagoe History Museum. It also shows one way by which a simple helmet bowl can be given an individual touch. In this case the crown is covered with horsehair to resemble a human scalp.

ABOVE RIGHT

A section from *Ehon Toyotomi Kunkoki* showing a small group of ashigaru spearmen in a daimyo's *yari-gumi*. The implication is that their spears are very long *nagae-yari*, as shown by the shafts disappearing out of the illustration. The ashigaru spearmen played a vital part at Nagashino even though their achievements have been overshadowed by the use of gunfire during that battle.

repeated along the line – was that the musket fire caused initial chaos but soon became sporadic and individual as the immediate area of the battlefield turned into one huge hacking mass of men and horses. The samurai may have sought single combat, but that would have been difficult amid the *mêlée* and the smoke. The personal attendants tried to protect their lords, while the ashigaru spearmen and musketeers lashed out at any they could see who were identified as enemy.

Returning to the individual case of Yamagata Masakage, here was a samurai skilled in single combat who had already demonstrated his prowess outside the walls of Yoshida Castle. He also still had the assistance of the three samurai who had attended him at that time. Yamagata Masakage therefore continued to fight as an individual and must have stayed on his horse, because we read of him breaking free from the *mêlée* and leading his men in another charge against the unit of Honda Tadakatsu. Here he was met by a further hail of bullets and was shot from off his horse's back. As he fell an Oda samurai ran up and cut off his head, which was taken back in triumph. *Shinchō-Kō ki* continues as follows to say that Yamagata Masakage was:

... replaced by a second wave under Takeda Nobukado, whose men attacked, were repulsed and charged again even though the muskets had thinned their ranks, just as Nobunaga had ordered. When over half their number had been hit they retreated but were replaced by a third wave. These were Obata Nobusada's troops from Western Kōzuke Province, who were dressed all in red. Warriors from the Kantō like these are skilled horsemen. Their preferred tactic was always to charge straight into the enemy ranks on horseback, so they galloped forwards to the beat of their war drums. But Nobunaga's men, lined up behind shields, waited with their muskets at the ready. Over half of Obata Nobusada's samurai were shot down, so his tattered force quit the battlefield. The fourth wave of the attack was led by Takeda Nobotoyo, whose samurai were dressed in black. (Kuwata 1965: 170)

These dramatic events were only the first phase of the samurai-versus-ashigaru encounter that was developing across the battlefield, because the battle of Nagashino still had several hours to run. From this point onwards the spears and swords of the Oda samurai came into their own to add to the ashigaru's own bullets, arrows and blades along with the occurrence of hand-to-hand fighting between mounted Takeda samurai and ashigaru spearmen. The presence of the palisade and the covering archery fire by the well-organized ashigaru *yumi-gumi* would have provided the opportunity for the musketeers to reload, and while they were doing so the spears of the *yari-gumi* 'would meet horses' breasts', in the later words of *Zōhyō Monogatari* (Sasama 1969: 68). Some thrusts would have been delivered through the fences, although it is likely that more (and much fiercer) encounters would have taken place against Takeda cavalrymen who had passed through the deliberately designed openings. These gaps allowed the creation of a killing-ground for the separated horsemen, who became the prey both for ashigaru spears and samurai swords.

It is important to note that *Shinchō-kō ki* insists that none of Oda Nobunaga's troops were let out of the protection of the fence. The precise words are, 'Thus one enemy unit relieved another, but not even one of Nobunaga's



In this modern copy of the Nagashino Screen on display in the Matsuura Historical Museum in Hirado, we see war drummers running forward beside mounted Takeda samurai who are being shot down. In the upper left of the picture a samurai takes the head of Yamagata Masakage.

commanders made his troops go forward from their lines. Nobunaga simply put more *teppō* to work, letting his ashigaru deal with everything' (Kuwata 1965: 171). The musketeers themselves would of course have been totally preoccupied with the business of loading, firing and reloading, keeping up the rhythm that their officers forced upon them and protected by the long spears of the *yari-gumi* ashigaru, whose contribution to the battle was in no way inferior to that of their musketeer colleagues. Yet still the Takeda charges kept coming and still the Oda guns kept firing:

Nobushige's men were shot down too and forced into a retreat. Baba Nobuharu led the fifth wave of the attack. They charged forward to the beat of the war drums, but Nobunaga's men stood firm in their positions and shot down Baba Nobuharu's followers, just as they had done for the others. The Takeda army continued with these repeated attacks in spite of the casualties. (Kuwata 1965: 171)

The next phase of the battle was a clash between Nobunaga's ashigaru and the now disordered and sometimes isolated Takeda mounted samurai, because not all of the senior casualties among the Takeda were killed during the charge. Two were killed during the retreat. The first prominent person to be caught was the commander of the vanguard of the centre squadron, the veteran Naitō Masatoyo, who was accompanied by the 100 men left out of his initial command of 1,000. Naitō Masatoyo was apprehended by Honda Tadakatsu, Ōsuga Yasutaka and Sakakibara Yasumasa, who had with

Shibata Katsuie (1522–83) was one of Oda Nobunaga's generals, and is shown in *Ehon Taikō ki* as a highly skilled mounted samurai. In this picture, his spearwork has sent four ashigaru flying into the air while four more are trampled underfoot. His loyal standard bearer runs along behind him holding Shibata's personal device of a golden *gohei* (a device used by Shinto priests to bestow blessings).







Samurai and ashigaru clash at Nagashino



Samurai view: This view shows the onslaught of the Takeda horsemen at the battle of Nagashino. The section depicted is the attack by the centre company's vanguard under Naitō Masatoyo, who leads his men against the fence. Masatoyo is dressed in prominent red armour. Even though this is a cavalry charge none of the horsemen are fighting alone,

because each is accompanied by personal attendants on foot, although in nearly all the cases they have been left behind by the enthusiastic horsemen. Apart from Masatoyo they are all dressed fairly uniformly in practical battledress armour with an identical black *sashimono* (back flag) bearing the Takeda *mon* in white.



Ashigaru view: This picture shows the moment of firing by Oda Nobunaga's ashigaru who are stationed in the centre of the line behind the protection of the fence. This is the contingent who were under the command of Honda Tadakatsu, whose antler helmet is visible to the rear along with his personal banner depicting Shoki, the Queller of Demons from Chinese mythology. Their matchlock muskets blaze away, and soon the whole scene will be obscured by smoke. Because the

musketeers have been drawn from different units in Nobunaga's army their ranks are far from uniform. The days of musket drill and rotating volley firing still lie in the future, but they stand and kneel shoulder to shoulder and fire on the command of the *teppō-kogashira*, who is seen lifting his bamboo *mashaku* (ranging pole). Behind the musketeers stand the rows of spearmen. Some of the musketeers have their weapons protruding already through the fence.

them a number of ashigaru archers. The archers fired at Naitō Masatoyo, hitting him many times. He fell from his horse, and, seeing him trying to lift his spear, a samurai called Asahina Yasukatsu thrust a spear at him and took his head. The most heroic death during the withdrawal was suffered by the other great veteran Baba Nobuharu, who took it upon himself to ensure Takeda Katsuyori's safety by covering his retreat. When the Oda forces caught up with the rearguard unit Baba Nobuharu announced his name in the manner of the samurai of old, stressing that only the greatest of samurai would take his head. The written account has him surrounded by a group of six spearmen in a classic ashigaru manoeuvre. On the painted screen the challenge is answered instead by two representative figures with spears, who attack him simultaneously.

Shattered by the carnage all around him, Takeda Katsuyori abandoned the battlefield and the hopeless struggle. Meanwhile swift messengers had conveyed the grim news back to Kōfu, so Katsuyori was met en route by Kosaka Danjō, who had abandoned his campaign against the Uesugi and hurried down to safeguard his lord's entry into Kai Province. The appearance of the Kosaka force on the border set a limit to Nobunaga's pursuit, so Katsuyori escaped. He finally withdrew into the safety of the mountains, accompanied at the last by only two samurai retainers, Tsuchiya Masatsune, brother of another Tsuchiya who was killed at Nagashino, and Hajikano Masatsugu. It would be several years before Nobunaga finally made an end of Katsuyori at the battle of Temmokuzan in 1582.

Takeda Katsuyori left behind on the battlefield of Nagashino 10,000 dead out of a total Takeda army of 15,000, a casualty rate of 67 per cent. As *Shinchō-Kō ki* puts it, 'About 10,000 Takeda troops, from high ranking warriors to common ashigaru, fell on the field of battle. Countless others either fled into the mountains to die of starvation, or were thrown from bridges into the water, or they drowned in the rivers' (Kuwata 1965: 171). The losses were particularly acute among the upper ranks of the Takeda retainers and family members. These were the men who had led from the front and had charged the Oda/Tokugawa lines at the head of their followers. Out of 97 named samurai leaders at Nagashino, 54 were killed and two badly wounded, 56 per cent of the total. No fewer than eight of the veteran Takeda 'Twenty-Four Generals', the men of Takeda Shingen's generation, lay dead. Losses on the allied side were also quite heavy, 6,000 killed out of 38,000, but this did not compare to the tragedy for the Takeda that bore the name of Nagashino, the greatest victory in Japanese history that can be credited in any way to ashigaru overcoming samurai.



Takeda samurai fall like flies on this painted screen of the battle of Nagashino. In a detail from the copy in Nakatsu Castle the units under the Takeda generals Mochizuki Nobumasa and Hara Masatane are shown being shot down, while in the lower right-hand corner Obata Norisada, the leader of the Western Kōzuke unit, rides on grimly; he would in fact survive the battle.

Analysis

The three battles described above illustrate important milestones on the road towards Japan's military revolution which, just as in contemporary Europe, would be characterized by a new reliance on mass infantry tactics conducted by organized and highly valued foot soldiers. At Uedahara the process had only just begun, and the confusion on the battlefield also reflects Takeda Shingen's inexperience of open warfare. Up until then Shingen's personal involvement had only been in castle attacks, leaving the conduct of field battles to his trusted generals. Uedahara – a battle of movement fought on a wide plain – was a new situation and the first defeat of Shingen's career.

The experience of Uedahara showed that the discipline which would soon be needed for successful musketry was already being applied to archers and spearmen even if self-discipline was woefully lacking in the samurai leader of the Takeda vanguard, who let Shingen down very badly. The entire emphasis of the Murakami's ashigaru deployment in 1548 is on the actions of their archers, spearmen and a handful of musketeers wielding Chinese-style handguns, all of whom had been well prepared to face an attack by the famous Takeda mounted samurai. Japanese infantry tactics may still have been work in progress, but they were already proving effective, because at Uedahara samurai were felled by 'hails of arrows' and Itagaki Nobukata was surrounded by 'hundreds of spears' belonging to disciplined ashigaru, who brought down a major prize (Nakamura 1965: 54).

By the time of Mikata ga Hara matters had moved on considerably. Both sides now commanded organized ashigaru squads, an asset that Tokugawa Ieyasu was prepared to throw away by abandoning his strong defensive position inside Hamamatsu Castle. Takeda Shingen, who had his own musket squads too, teased out the Tokugawa firepower and their likely position by the simple expedient of forcing expendable recruits to throw stones at them from a close distance. He then risked a cavalry charge, followed by another, and by the time that his third wave reached the Tokugawa *hatamoto* a classic mounted



samurai victory was on the cards. The Tokugawa ashigaru who could have stopped his mounted advance were in retreat along with the samurai.

At the battle of Nagashino Shingen's heir Takeda Katsuyori would be decisively defeated by a skilled general who finally used a combination of arms to its best advantage, whereby organised bodies of musketeers, backed up by archers and protected by simple field defences and the long spears of their comrades, broke a mounted charge and allowed their own samurai to come to grips with their enemy. It is therefore tempting to see Nagashino as the decisive moment in history when ashigaru finally triumphed over mounted samurai, but such an analysis of the victory is somewhat exaggerated. As an example of this tendency, A.L. Sadler, in his *The Maker of Modern Japan* (1937), whose source for the battle was *Mikawa Gofudo ki*, credited Nobunaga with choosing 'three thousand specially selected marksmen' who would 'fire in volleys of a thousand men alternately ... It was the machine gun and wire entanglement of those days' (Sadler 1937: 103–05). This has become the accepted view of Nagashino, and the notorious final scene depicting the battle in Kurosawa Akira's film *Kagemusha* (1980) makes the action look as though the bullets were indeed delivered by machine guns.

Oda Nobunaga did not possess the resources to mimic machine guns by keeping up a constant barrage of fire, because true volley firing by three alternating ranks – a tactic that would be first introduced to Europe many decades later – depended upon hours of drill and practice. Many of the musketeers Nobunaga arranged behind the palisades were not his own troops

A re-enactor from the Marugame Group on Shikoku Island fires his matchlock musket in unison with his colleagues. The smoke from this small discharge is quite noticeable, and one can appreciate the dense clouds that must have accompanied the battle of Nagashino, when 1,000 guns were discharged in rapid succession. The Marugame Group recreate Sengoku Period musketry with great accuracy, even though they do it dressed as samurai rather than lowly ashigaru.



This print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861) shows a remarkable fight between a mounted samurai and ashigaru. While defending his castle of Nagakubo against the Takeda army in 1543 Oda Sadataka (here called Odai Yorisada) is unhorsed and wounded by a hail of arrows from the Takeda ashigaru, yet he still manages to transfix three of them at once on the end of his spear.

but had been supplied by allies and subordinates just a few days before the battle took place. There was therefore no time to drill them in anything like the counter-march of Renaissance Europe. Alternate volleys of numerous bullets were certainly delivered, but these should be understood as a response to the successive waves of attack launched by the Takeda cavalry, not the rotating barrage in *Kagemusha*. The firing was nonetheless deadly and was delivered not in any sporadic or opportunistic manner but in organized volleys controlled by the iron discipline of the five senior samurai whom Nobunaga had placed in command of the hastily assembled musketeers.

So why did Takeda Katsuyori charge the guns? *Kagemusha* makes it look like an act of mass suicide, but the written accounts show that Katsuyori was well aware of the number of guns that Oda Nobunaga possessed and that two factors had encouraged him to proceed in spite of them. The first was the heavy rain of the night before, which was likely to have rendered the matchlock muskets unusable. The second was the great speed and impact of the Takeda mounted charge. Katsuyori was a cavalryman through and through and had led a charge at Mikata ga Hara against a disordered enemy. At Nagashino his mounted samurai had only 200m to cover. It was likely that there would be some casualties from bullets, but not enough to break the momentum of the charge which would then disorder the Oda troops. Logic then said that the Takeda horsemen would be upon the hopeless ashigaru as they tried to reload. There would be hand-to-hand fighting in which the Oda guns would be useless, and indeed an encumbrance. The renowned Takeda samurai would sweep the flimsy fences to one side, cut down the ashigaru with their swords and spears, engage the demoralized enemy samurai and pursue them down to the Toyokawa, where the river would cut off their retreat. The outcome, of course was the exact opposite.

The manner in which Katsuyori's defeat was accomplished was more than a personal disaster. It was also a challenge to samurai pride, because effective musket fire, much more than archery, required the ashigaru to be placed at the front of an army, and that was the position traditionally occupied by the most loyal and glorious samurai. For centuries there had been great honour attached to being the first to come to grips with an enemy, so to place the lowest-ranking troops in such a position ignored the demands of samurai glory. The successful daimyo of the future would learn how to cope with this, and would regularly use ashigaru fire to break down the enemy ranks ready for a spirited charge by samurai, at which point the samurai spear and sword would dominate the fighting, just as Oda Nobunaga had done at Nagashino.

By the 1590s these arrangements had become commonplace, reflecting a profound change in attitude by the daimyo, although not everyone approved. Some samurai still thought that ashigaru were contemptible and that the matchlock muskets they wielded so effectively should really be weapons for an individual samurai, so we read many years later in *Jōzan Kidan* (Chronicle of Armed Warfare, 1770): 'As a rule on the battlefield, it is the job of the ashigaru to face on to the enemy and fire *teppō* in volleys into the midst of the enemy. As for the *teppō* owned by samurai, they are for shooting and bringing down an enemy of importance' (Sasama 1969: 61). There also exists one scornful and snobbish comment in another chronicle which laments that, 'instead of ten or twenty horsemen riding out together from an army's ranks, there are now only ashigaru armies' (Sasama 1968: 289). These 'ashigaru armies' of course represented nothing less than the emergence in Japan of large-scale infantry tactics in an exact parallel to the similar trend that was happening in 16th-century Europe.

The fateful charge of the mounted samurai of the Takeda clan at Nagashino is brilliantly realized in this full-sized diorama at the Ise Sengoku Village, a historical theme park near Ise in Mie Prefecture. The samurai are carrying typical *mochi-yari* spears and have the Takeda badge on their back flags.



Aftermath

The events that occurred on the battlefield of Nagashino constituted a vital episode in the Japanese military revolution, and nothing better illustrated its political fallout than what was to happen when the smoke had cleared, because the victorious Oda Nobunaga went on to become the first daimyo to lay the foundations for a newly unified Japan. One of the ways he did this was by developing the concept towards which Takeda Shingen had been moving: that the different fighting skills and weaponry of the samurai and the ashigaru were complementary and could be brought together in an organized and disciplined manner. Indeed, not only could it be done, it *had* to be done, and so successful would the model prove that when Japan's reunification was finally achieved by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1591 the ashigaru were on the way to being integrated into daimyo armies as the lower ranks of the once-exclusive samurai class. Not only that, but Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the daimyo who brought Japan under one sword for the first time in over a century, had originally served as an ashigaru.

The three key battles described in this book had pointed the way in which Japanese warfare was moving, and from Nagashino onwards the battles of the Sengoku Period had to be approached as potential contests between the shock of a cavalry charge and the disciplined reaction from protected infantry. Thus it was that at the battle of Komaki in 1584 both sides took to the field under commanders who had fought at Nagashino, so both erected field fortifications. So firmly held was each line that one army went off on a raid elsewhere and the subsequent battle of Nagakute was fought on open fields far from the defences. Eight years later, musketry would become particularly effective during the very one-sided battles of the invasion of Korea in 1592, and even the effects of an initial volley of musket fire could make a tremendous difference to the outcome of a battle. At Tennōji in 1615, with which the siege of Osaka concluded, some of the Toyotomi troops were forced into a disastrously precipitate action by musket fire.



The overall lesson that Japan had learned by the time of the peaceful years of the Edo Period was that no unit within a daimyo's army could operate alone. There had to be cooperation between the ranks, and in time the nomenclature of the samurai class evolved to reflect this. In particular, the term *hatamoto* gradually changed from meaning the Tokugawa household troops who served literally beneath the flag on a battlefield to the senior tier of the samurai class who administered the Shogun's affairs in peacetime and, if ever it again became necessary, in war. Beneath the *hatamoto* ranked the samurai known as *yoriki*, otherwise known as *gokenin* (housemen), while below the *yoriki* ranks were the ashigaru, now both understood and appreciated as the lowest-ranking samurai, yet 'proper' samurai nevertheless. With this formal acknowledgement of the ashigaru as samurai came the further recognition provided by the remarkable *Zōhyō Monogatari*, written by a serving samurai who had command of ashigaru and wished to pass on to posterity his own tips on how to get the best out of them. The significance of *Zōhyō Monogatari* lies in the fact that it was written at all. The wars of the earlier centuries had produced a literature that concentrated almost exclusively on the individual heroic prowess of named samurai. *Zōhyō Monogatari* is a handbook for the commanders of ashigaru, a class of fighting man whom the earlier writers had preferred to regard almost as non-existent. By 1649 the ashigaru were recognized for the immense contribution they could make as real samurai. Their integration was complete.

This vivid book illustration is a graphic depiction of a group of ashigaru overcoming a samurai who has been pulled from his horse. Two attack him with spears; one has a sword and another has a dagger. The samurai looks on helplessly as the fifth ashigaru wrests his sword from his right hand.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A note on sources

The researcher of Japanese warfare in the Sengoku Period is fortunate in that there are a large number of primary sources available. These include battle reports, often compiled by a commander on the field in order to claim rewards for his men from a higher authority; family histories, chronicles of wars and battles (sometimes composed while there were eyewitnesses still living); and the romantic versions of the latter which were the *gunkimono* or 'war tales'. The latter works tended to exaggerate the individual exploits of heroic samurai, but they contain many fascinating points of details regarding weapon use that help to expand on the overall narrative of a conflict. Three works in particular have been employed for this book. *Kōyō Gunkan* is the epic chronicle of the Takeda family attributed to Kōsaka Danjō, one of Shingen's 'Twenty-Four Generals', and finally completed by Obata Kagenori in 1616. It has many of the characteristics of a *gunkimono*, and some of its sections are outright works of fiction, but its account of the battle of Uedahara is backed up by other contemporary sources and is widely regarded as reliable. Much more reliable is *Shinchō-Kō ki*, the biography of Oda Nobunaga written by his follower Ōta Gyūichi, who was an eyewitness to many of the incidents he describes. *Shinchō-Kō ki* is therefore regarded as both accurate and factual so, for example, the figures Ōta Gyūichi presents for the number of matchlock muskets at Nagashino are more likely to be true than those found within *Mikawa Gofudo ki*. That work took its final form only in 1833 and although based on the huge amount of detail that was available about its subject, Tokugawa Ieyasu, the author's desire to please the Tokugawa shoguns may have led to a certain exaggeration. My treatment of Mikata ga Hara is drawn from *Mikawa Gofudo ki*, which presents an account of the battle so unflattering to Ieyasu that it has a considerable ring of truth!

Also quoted here are *Hōjō Godai ki* and *Ōu Eikei Gunki*, which deal with the Hōjō family of Odawara and the northern daimyo respectively, and have been used in this book for points of detail, as have a few minor snippets from elsewhere. Finally, we have the valuable *Zōhyō Monogatari*, which is attributed to one of Ieyasu's generals. He is describing weapons and modes of fighting of his day, which are based on the lessons learned during the Sengoku Period, so there are some traps for the

unwary historian such as his description of the knife that makes a bow into a spear. Nevertheless his account of ashigaru life has the ring of truth, even if their organization during the time of Takeda Shingen and Oda Nobunaga was much less rigid.

All the quotations I have translated from Japanese sources are taken from printed versions of the originals as listed below under the names of their modern editors, except in the case of *Zōhyō Monogatari*, where I have used the extensive sets of excerpts in the two books listed by Sasama: *Buke Senjin Sakuhō Shūsei* (1968) and *Ashigaru no Seikatsu* (1969). Sasama's 1968 book is also the source of brief quotations from *Jōzan Kidan* and other documents as noted above. There are a few other original sources quoted in the two main secondary works for Mikata ga Hara and Nagashino by Owada (1989) and Futaki (1989) respectively.



In this print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861) a samurai on foot lowers his *mochi-yari* (spear) against an oncoming attack of what is likely to be a group of ashigaru spearmen, although all that we can see are the tips of numerous threatening spear blades.

Works cited

- Brown, Delmer M. (1948). 'The Impact of Firearms on Japanese Warfare, 1543–98', in *Far Eastern Quarterly* Vol. 7: 236–53.
- Elisonas, J.S.A. & Lamers, J.P., trans. and ed. (2011). *The Chronicle of Lord Nobunaga by Ōta Gyūichi*. Leiden: Brill.
- Futaki Ken'ichi (1989). *Nagashino no tatakai*. Tokyo: Gakken Mook.
- Hagiwara Toshio, ed. (1966). *Hōjō Godai ki*, in *Sengoku Shiryō Sōsho* Vol. 21. Tokyo: Jinbutsu Ōraisha.
- Imamura Yoshio, ed. (2005). *Ōu Eikei Gunki*. Tokyo: Jinbutsu Ōraisha.
- Kuwata Tadachika, ed. (1965). *Shinchō-Kō ki*. Tokyo: Jinbutsu Ōraisha.
- Kuwata Tadachika & Utagawa Terao, eds (1976). *Kaisei Mikawa Gofudo ki*. Tokyo: Akita Shoten.
- Lamers, J.P. (2000). *Japonius Tyrannus: The Japanese Warlord Oda Nobunaga Reconsidered*. Leiden: Hotei Publishing.
- Lidin, Olof G. (2002). *Tanegashima: The Arrival of Europeans in Japan*. Guildford: Nias Press.
- Maruta Junichi (1988). 'Sengoku saikyō – Takeda kibadai no shinsō', in various authors, eds, *Takeda Shingen* (Vol. 5. of the series *Rekishi Gunzō*) Tokyo: Gakken: pp. 170–75.
- Nakamura Kōya et al., eds (1965). *Kōyō Gunkan* Vol. 2. Tokyo: Jinbutsu Ōraisha.
- Owada Tetsuo (1989). *Mikata ga Hara no tatakai*. Tokyo: Gakken Mook.
- Sadler, A.L. (1937). *The Maker of Modern Japan*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Sasama Yoshihiko (1968). *Buke Senjin Sakuhō Shūsei*. Tokyo: Yūzankaku.
- Sasama Yoshihiko (1969). *Ashigaru no Seikatsu*. Tokyo: Yuzankaku Shuppan.
- Suzuki Masaya (2000). *Teppō to Nihonjin*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- Tanaka Yoshiatsu (1997). 'Kiba gundan 'saikyō' densetsu no shinsō o ou', in various authors, eds, *Sengoku Kassen Taizen*, Rekishi Gunzō Series Vol. 50. Tokyo: Gakken: pp. 104–09.
- Turnbull, Stephen (2017). *Ninja: Unmasking the Myth*. London: Frontline Books.
- Varley, H. Paul (1994). *Warriors of Japan as portrayed in the war tales*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.



A modern-day drawing from Ueda Castle showing a *teppō-gumi* (musket squad) in action. They are going through the various stages of ramming, preparing the pan and firing from a kneeling position. They are also using cartridge boxes, introduced sometime after Nagashino, which were very useful in speeding up the reloading process.

INDEX

References to illustrations are shown in **bold**.

aka sonae ('red regiments') 62

Akiyama Nobutomo 7, 46

Anegawa, battle of (1570) 18, 25, 26, 63

archers/archery squads (*yumi-gumi*) 5, 8, 11, 15, 16, 20, 21, 24, 24, 28, 35, 36, 44, 51, 51, 52, 61, 64, 66, 67, 71, 72, 73

armour 5, 5, 17, 18, 19, 19, 21, 22, 23, 23, 26, 27, 27, 38–39, 40, 61, 62, 65, 66, 68–69, 70

arrow boxes (*yabako*) 16, 20, 24

ashigaru

command structure 14–16, 15

promotion to samurai 10, 11, 76, 77

recruitment of 4, 5, 10, 14–15

roles of 6, 10, 10, 11, 20, 21, 24, 70, 76

vs samurai 8, 19, 20, 24–25, 25, 26–27, 27–28, 33, 37, 38–39, 40, 40, 46, 50–51, 51, 54, 56–57, 61, 63, 63, 64, 66–67, 67, 68–69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 77

ashigaru-taishō 15, 16, 34, 64

Baba Nobuharu 11, 48, 50, 58, 60, 64, 67, 71

banners and flags 10, 23, 38–39, 40, 61

sashimono 10, 18, 19, 19, 36, 38–39, 40, 68–69, 70, 75

sode-jirushi 36, 38–39, 40

battle formations (Chinese, use of) 48

bows and arrows 5, 6, 11, 15, 16, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26–27, 28, 32, 35, 38–39, 40, 40, 51, 51, 52, 54, 61, 64, 66, 74

bullet/cartridge boxes 16, 21, 79

castles: Akana 36; Akechi 7, 55; Arato 7, 34,

35; Asahiya 44; Futamata 7, 46, 47,

48; Gifu 7; Hamamatsu 6, 7, 45, 47, 48,

51, 52–53, 72; Hitokotosaka 7, 46; Iida 7,

56; Inui 46; Iwamura 7, 46; Kajiki 35;

Kannomine 62; Katsurao 6, 7, 34, 35, 35;

Kiyosu 7; Minowa 44; Muraki 54–55;

Nagakubo Castle 74; Noda 53, 53, 62;

Okazaki 6, 7, 55–56, 60; Otari 62; Shiga

7, 32, 33; Takane 7, 43, 46; Takatenjin 7,

55; Toishi 34; Tsutsujigasaki 6, 7, 12, 17;

Uehara 33, 41; Uminokuchi 7; Yoshida 7,

56–57, 66

Courier Guards (*tsukai-ban*) 14

Foot Guards (*kachi*) 13

'Four Guardian Kings' 18, 19

handguns (Chinese) 6, 8, 36, 38–39, 40, 50,

54, 72

Hara Masatane 71

batamoto 12, 13, 18, 34, 40, 44, 48, 51, 72–73, 77

Hataya, battle of (1600) 27–28

Hirate Hirohide 50, 51, 53

Hirate Jinzaemon 47, 51

headgear 10, 12, 15, 18, 19, 26, 27, 50, 65, 79

jingasa 21, 22, 23, 38–39, 40

head-taking/viewing ceremonies 25, 33, 37,

40, 41, 43, 46, 48, 53, 66, 67, 71

Hōjō army/clan 35–36, 44, 62

Hōjō Sōun 10

Hōjō Ujimasa 36, 44

Honda Tadakatsu 10, 46, 61, 66, 67, 70

Horse Guards (*go umamawari-shū*) 13, 35, 61

Iida Harima-no Kami 27–28

Itagaki Nobukata 14, 20, 33, 36–37, 38–39, 40, 40, 34, 41, 72

Kamijō Oribe 37, 40

kashira (senior officer) 15, 16

Kawanakajima, battles of (1553–64) 6, 7, 32,

42, 62, 64

kogashira (lesser leaders) 15–16

Komaki, battle of (1584) 76

Korean Invasion (1592–93) 16, 76

Kosaka Danjō 56, 71

Maeda Toshiie 46, 64

Makara Jūrōzaemon 25, 26

mashaku (ranging pole) 15, 16

matchlock muskets (*teppō*) 5, 6, 8, 8, 15, 15,

20–21, 22, 24, 28–29, 28, 32, 35, 36, 44, 48,

50, 52, 54, 55, 56–57, 61, 61, 62, 64, 65,

66, 67, 67, 68–69, 70, 73–74, 73, 75, 79

Mikata ga Hara, battle of (1573) 7, 8, 10, 12,

13, 18, 18, 19, 22, 23, 23, 42–48, 47, 49,

50–53, 56, 62, 65, 72–73, 74–75

Mikawa Campaign 55–57

Mimasatoge, battle of (1569) 62

Mochizuki Nobumasa 71

mon (clan/family badge) 10, 19, 22, 23, 38–39,

40, 68–69, 70

Murakami army/clan 8, 33, 34, 35, 35, 36–37,

40, 41, 41, 72

Murakami Yoshiaki 6, 12, 32, 33, 34–35,

36, 40, 41

musketeers/musket squads (*teppō-gumi*) 8, 11,

11, 14, 15, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 23,

28–29, 44, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56–57, 58,

61, 61, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, 67, 68–69, 70,

72, 73–74, 74–75, 76, 79

Nagakute, battle of (1584) 7, 76

Nagashino, battle of 7, 8, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15,

18, 21, 24, 54–58, 57, 59, 60–67, 61, 67,

68–69, 70–71, 71, 73–74, 75, 75, 76

Naitō Ienaga 5

Naitō Masatoyo 64, 67, 68–69, 70, 71

Natsume Yoshinobu 51–52

Nobuyasu Ieyasu 6, 55

Obata Nobusada 62, 64, 65, 66

Obata Norisada 71

Oda Nobuhide 63

Oda Nobutada 6, 8, 12, 14, 14, 21, 29, 43, 44,

45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53, 54, 55, 58, 59,

60–61, 63, 64, 66, 67, 67, 70, 71, 73–74,

75, 76, 78

Oda/Tokugawa alliance 55, 58, 59, 60, 73–74

Odai Yorisada 74

Odaihara, battle of (1547) 7, 33

Oga Yashirō 55–56

Oi Sadataka/Odai Yorisada 74

Okehazama, battle of (1560) 7

Okubo Tadasuke 61, 65

Okubo Tadayo 52, 61, 65

Okudaira Sadamasa 57, 61

quivers 5, 20, 24, 24, 28

Saigakage 48, 49, 52, 60

Saigusa Moritomo 15, 48, 51

Saijō Campaign (1572–73) 7, 42, 43–48, 43,

49, 54, 56, 62

Sakakibara Yasumasa 18, 19, 22, 67

samurai 5, 6, 9, 10, 10, 11, 12–13, 14, 18, 19,

19, 25, 34, 42

as elite 4, 9, 40, 75

command role 12–13

and personal glory 20, 56, 57

combat tactics 16–17, 17, 20, 75, 78:

cavalry charge 9, 11, 16–17, 20, 24–25,

36, 50, 72–73, 75

personal attendants 6, 10, 13, 14, 17, 17,

26, 37, 38–39, 40, 44, 52, 62, 63, 66, 67,

68–69, 70

vs ashigaru 8, 19, 20, 24–25, 25, 26–27,

27–28, 33, 37, 38–39, 40, 40, 40, 46,

50–51, 51, 54, 56–57, 61, 63, 63, 64,

66–67, 67, 68–69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 77

vs samurai 71

samurai-taishō 13–14, 62, 62

Sekigahara, battle of (1600) 17

Shibata Katsuei 63, 67

Shogunate/Shogun(s) 5, 42–43

spearman/spear squads (*yari-gumi*) 8, 11, 16,

19, 21, 24–25, 29, 32, 34, 35, 37, 38–39,

40, 44, 51, 52, 57, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68–69,

70, 71, 72, 78

spears 5, 5, 6, 10, 11, 11, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21,

24–26, 28, 29, 34, 37, 46, 51, 52, 54, 56–57,

63, 66, 67, 67, 71, 73, 74, 74, 75, 77, 78

hazu yari 28

mochi yari 25–26, 38–39, 40, 75, 78

nagae-yari 10, 29, 29, 32, 34, 38–39, 40, 65

te-yari 29

Sakai Tadatsugu 52, 56

stone-throwers 20, 48, 50, 72

swords 5, 10, 11, 18, 21, 22, 28, 35, 38–39,

40, 63, 66, 74, 75, 77

katana 26

nodachi 18, 18, 19, 25, 26

Takeda armies/clan 6, 7, 8, 10–11, 12, 14–15,

16–17, 20, 22, 23, 32, 34, 38–39, 40, 40,

42, 44, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59,

62, 62, 64–65, 66, 67, 67, 68–69, 70, 71,

71, 74, 75

Takeda Harunobu 34

Takeda Katsuyori 7, 8, 12, 42, 47, 54, 55–56,

57, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 64, 71, 73, 74–75

Takeda Nobukado 64, 66

Takeda Nobushige 64, 67

Takeda Nobutoyo 64, 66

Takeda Nobuzane 61

Takeda Shingen Harunobu 6, 7, 8, 10–11, 12,

12, 13, 13, 14–15, 16, 17, 32, 33, 34, 35,

40, 41, 41, 42, 43–45, 43, 45–47, 45, 48, 49,

50, 51, 53, 53, 54, 55, 60, 62, 68–69, 71,

72–73

Takeda Yoshinobu 62

Takeda/Hōjō alliance 44

Temmokuzan, battle of (1582) 71

Tennōji, battle of (1615) 76

teppō-kogashira 15, 15, 16

teppō-kogashori 68–69, 71

teppō-kumigashira 15

Tokugawa Ieyasu 4, 6, 10, 12, 13, 18, 26, 44,

45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56,

60, 61, 72

Tokugawa forces 18, 19, 19, 47, 49, 49, 51–52,

55–56, 77

Toyotomi Hideyoshi 29, 40, 63, 63, 76

'Twenty-Four Generals' 11, 12, 13, 13, 15,

33, 34, 38–39, 40, 40, 46, 55, 56, 57, 57,

62, 62, 71

Uedahara, battle of 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 20,

30–33, 32, 33, 34–37, 35, 38–39, 40, 40–41,

41, 50, 72

Uenohara, battle of (1557) 62

Uesugi clan 32, 44, 71

Uesugi Kenshin 33, 34, 40, 44, 46, 55, 56, 62

Yamagata Masakage 7, 45, 46, 62, 62, 64, 65,

66, 67

yari-kumigashira 15

yumi-kogashira 15–16

yumi-kumigashira 15

OSPREY PUBLISHING
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com
www.ospreypublishing.com

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 2019

© Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2019

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB 9781472832436; eBook 9781472832443;
ePDF 9781472832429; XML 9781472832450

Maps by www.bounford.com

Index by Rob Munro

Typeset by PDQ Digital Media Solutions, Bungay, UK

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

To find out more about our authors and books visit **www.ospreypublishing.com**. Here you will find extracts, author interviews, details of forthcoming events and the option to sign up for our newsletter.

Dedication

Samurai vs Ashigaru is my fiftieth Osprey book. When my first Osprey book – a hardback entitled *The Samurai: A Military History* – was commissioned early in 1975, I never envisaged that I would still be contributing new material to the same company in 2019! I would therefore like to dedicate this book to all the hard-working editors, artists and designers of Osprey Publishing with whom I have had the pleasure of working for almost 45 years.

Author's note

Japanese names are given in the conventional style of family name/clan name first, personal name second, e.g. Oda Nobunaga not Nobunaga Oda. Note, however, that the personal name is normally used as the identifier in a textual narrative. So, for example, 'Nobunaga ordered an attack', not 'Oda ordered an attack'. All the illustrations used in this book are from the author's own 'Japan Archive' Picture Library (www.stephenturnbull.com).